



The Navy Lark Appreciation Society Newsletter

NAVY DAYS



He Made US very 'appy

BUNG HO!

As winter creeps on and the radio and TV schedules continue to lack quality light entertainment, it is comforting to be able to pick up a tape or CD and immerse oneself in a storyline from *The Navy Lark*. The evergreen quality of the writing and the unique talents of the cast continue to give delightful performances in this timeless classic which is every bit as warming and comforting as a log fire and buttered toast.

Ronnie Barker's untimely passing genuinely took the nation by surprise. Without a doubt, most people reflected how this wonderful individual entertained and enriched our lives.

In this special edition of *Navy Days*, we celebrate Ronnie and his work. Regrettably, some newspapers are unable to avoid salacious gossip and those periodicals are the poorer for including such references. The collection of cuttings is not exhaustive but represents a selection of material found and forwarded to us by the membership. Our thanks to everyone who posted articles to the wardroom; each and every one of you, in supporting the Society, has helped make this issue the better.

A selection of TV broadcasts and news bulletins has been recorded – but again there are gaps, so if you have anything on disc or tape please forward a copy to us. A compilation of web-site pages posting a tribute or information about Ronnie has been put onto CD. If you would like a copy, please forward a self addressed envelope (first class) and a loose first class stamp (for office use).

Avid listeners might know that Ronnie was in the opening dialogue of the very first *Navy Lark* broadcast. The show's "stars" stepped up to the microphone later in the programme.



Illustrations Fred Vintner 2005

The BBC's last *Navy Lark* CD/Tape issue (17) "Taking Some Liberties" was compiled at our request and celebrated Ronnie Barker as Lt Queeg, the hapless engineer aboard *Troutbridge*. It was a role Ronnie enjoyed. We spoke together on a couple of occasions about the material, and he was hugely pleased that the NLAS could assist him in re-discovering those performances for a television documentary.

Ronnie was an enthusiastic supporter of The *Navy Lark* Appreciation Society. He not only found personal items which he shared with us but was also happy to communicate with Society members. He was hugely generous and he continually recognised the value of *The Navy Lark* in his career and his life. He genuinely had time and interest not only for those who worked with him but also for those who admired him.

Ronnie's characterisations for *The Navy Lark* were no doubt helped by his repertory theatre experiences of the 1950s. With the workload of two plays per week and frequently having to make multiple appearances on stage, it was a demanding environment which required the honing of accents, speech patterns and mannerisms. The frequent changes of town and theatre (he even performed in two plays on the same night – running off stage and down the street and into a second theatre) provided a massive dialect resource. These theatrical experiences provided the young Ronald Barker with first hand encounters of regional traits which subsequently provided him with a 'directory' of voices and aphorisms, allowing him to create a hugely diverse cast of players. So adept was he that Lawrie Wyman felt able to broaden his character list occasionally; this meant that Ronnie appeared in substantially differing guises which frequently numbered up to four distinct characters in a single show. It was of enormous interest to learn from Evelyn Wells that not all of Ronnie's character voices were deemed acceptable by Alastair Scott Johnston or indeed the rest of the cast. No doubt his portrayals of some characters were a little more eccentric than perhaps the public might appreciate.



So memorable is some of Ronnie's work in *The Navy Lark* that sometimes a comic character grew out of all proportion to the number of performances actually made. It might come as a shock to discover that a well remembered uncouth voice telephoning *Troutbridge* with the incongruous statement "Intelligence speaking" did in fact only appear in a handful of shows. The impact of the dialogue and the way Ronnie delivered it has meant that legions of us *believed* the character was a regular!

Stanton was a show regular for the first six series. Ronnie's erstwhile ship's Captain was a delight to encounter and immediately became a favourite. He arrived in the pilot show (broadcast as series 1 episode 2) and finally disappeared in August 1965 during series 7. In Stanton there was total recognition that he was the worst sailor on the frigate. He fully acknowledged that his absence meant the management of the vessel was better done by those who were more competent! Stanton consistently minimised his ineffectiveness by disappearing at the slightest opportunity to go fishing.

Another memorable character was the accident prone Commander Bell. In "A Change of Heart" 29.08.1965 Ronnie gave a virtuoso performance of incompetence and social ineptitude which remains a wonderful legacy of timing and delivery. Lt. Queeg, the ship's chief engineer, arrived to take over the mantle of hopelessness in series 6!

Navy Days readers will appreciate that previous opening remarks are always prefaced with "Bung Ho!" The greeting is derived from those amusing exchanges between HMS *Troutbridge* regulars and the Forbodians so expressively portrayed by Ronnie Barker and Michael Bates. The discernable joy of their comic interpretation is totally infectious and a return appearance in an episode assured the listener of a broad grin as the inane met the absurd.

We have some exciting news and plenty of library developments to reveal in the next issue. The last three months have seen some outstanding success in locating new material and show upgrades. We will be offering a competition with a nice little prize as well as an in depth look at *The Big Business Lark*.

Keep those letters flowing in, and from everyone in the Wardroom we wish you A Joyful Christmas and A Happy New Year!

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The world pays tribute to genius Ronnie Barker BUT DID HE DIE OF A BROKEN HEART?

IT'S GOODNIGHT FROM HIM: SEE PAGES 4&5 AND PAGES 20&21

PENSIONS CRISIS: IT JUST GETS WORSE

One in four Britons will
be too hard up to retire

By Sarah O'Grady
Social Affairs Correspondent

THE number of people forced to work well beyond retirement age will double in the next decade, it was revealed yesterday.

An alarming report into the pensions crisis shows that millions are losing a race against time as they try to save as much as possible to stave off grinding poverty in their old age.

One in four Britons aged between 55 and 64 do not feel they will have enough money in their pensions to stop working at the state retirement age, the report reveals. That will force as many

TURN TO PAGE 2, COLUMN 3



Sharon Stone: The face of Dior at 47

SEE PAGE 3

Ronnie...Pure

By Mark Jagasia
and Mark Reynolds

COMIC Ronnie Corbett paid tribute yesterday to his TV partner Ronnie Barker as "pure gold in triplicate".

He said the star of *Porridge*, *Open All Hours* and *The Two Ronnies*, who died on Monday at the age of 76 with his wife Joy by his side, was a "comedy Goliath".

"His death is a major loss and the end of an era," said Mr Corbett. "Eric and Ernie have gone and there are now very few of the old brigade left."

The death of Mr Barker following a long illness triggered an outpouring of tributes, many from fellow comedians.

BBC director-general Mark Thompson said: "We have lost a giant of comedy. Ronnie Barker will be numbered among a select band of comedy greats who shaped British comedy in the 20th century."

Mr Barker was an intensely private family man who shunned showbusiness parties.

He had been nursed at his home in the hamlet of Dean near Chipping Norton in Oxfordshire but is believed to have spent his last 24 hours in a hospice. He and Joy had been married for 48 years.

"He died after a long period of heart trouble," said his agent Rosalind Chatto. "He died peacefully and his wife was with him."

Although Mr Barker announced his retirement from showbusiness in 1987 to run an antiques shop, he had recently been lured back to television.

Barker and Corbett filmed a Christmas special of *The Two Ronnies Sketchbook* which is scheduled to be shown this December.

A senior figure at the BBC said: "Ronnie took me to one side this summer and said, 'There is a chance I won't make it to the end of the year'."

"He knew he was ill, which is why the Christmas show was shot so early. He really, really wanted it to be seen. Of course it is up to Joy and his family but I very much expect it will be shown." The BBC is also to repeat its 2004 Bafta tribute to Mr Barker on Friday evening.

Mr Corbett, 74, said yesterday: "We spoke last week and he said to me, 'I'm going'. I think his energy had gone, he was slipping away and I suppose it was

Corbett leads tributes as genius Barker dies at 76



BEST FRIENDS: Fellow comedian Ronnie Corbett at his home yesterday

a release in the end. It is a very sad time. We worked together for more than 40 years and Ronnie is with me all of the time, in my thoughts. He was my closest friend. Our families were both very close."

Mr Corbett said that his wife Anne had spoken by phone to Joy soon after the comic's death. He said: "We've known about this and had prepared for it. I feel very sorry for Joy. She's on her own now." Mr Barker was a talented straight actor and writer and attracted

plaudits for his work in two television films, *My House In Umbria*, in which he starred in 2003 alongside Dame Maggie Smith, and *The Gathering Storm* in which he played the manservant Inch in 2002 to Albert Finney's Winston Churchill.

The entertainer is survived by Joy and their three children, actress Charlotte Barker, 43, actor Adam Barker, 39, and Larry Barker. A huge number of tributes followed the announcement of his death. David

Jason, who rose to fame playing the put-upon Granville alongside Mr Barker in *Open All Hours* and who in the past has said he regarded Mr Barker as a mentor, said: "I was deeply shocked and saddened to hear of Ronnie's death. He was a very dear friend and someone for whom I had the greatest respect."

"Working with Ronnie was always a joy and they were, without doubt some of the best years of my career."

John Cleese, who appeared with Mr Barker in the *Frost Report* - most memorably in the famous sketch about the British class system - described him as, "a warm, friendly and encouraging presence to have when I started in television" and "a great comic actor to learn from".

Monty Python star Michael Palin said: "I can't think of anyone who knew how to play comedy better than Ronnie Barker."

"Ronnie was a straightforward, down-to-earth man who had this extraordinary ability to make the nation laugh, probably more often than anyone else I know."

Bea Ballard, the BBC executive who persuaded Mr Barker to make *The Two Ronnies Sketchbook*, said: "What most excited him was the younger generation of people who made up the audience. That was immensely gratifying to him."

Bolton comic Peter Kay said: "He made me laugh so much and I'm just so lucky to have been able to get to know my hero and the person that I aspire to be."

Veteran entertainer Bruce Forsyth said: "I am so sad that I never worked with him. He was so good at everything he did."

"You can't call Ronnie Barker a comedian. He was an actor and a great writer. That made him so very, very special, which is why you can't replace anyone like Ronnie Barker."

"He never traded in smut. Today you can get very vulgar and crude lines. In his lines there was always a double meaning, but he was never, ever crude at any time in his career."

Actor Brian Blessed spoke of when he met the *Two Ronnies* by chance in a lift in the 1960s.

"By the time I reached the top floor I'd be in complete hysterics and they wouldn't have uttered a word."

AND IT'S GOODNIGHT FROM HIM: PAGES 20-21

The Daily Telegraph

Ronnie Barker cremated

By Richard Savill

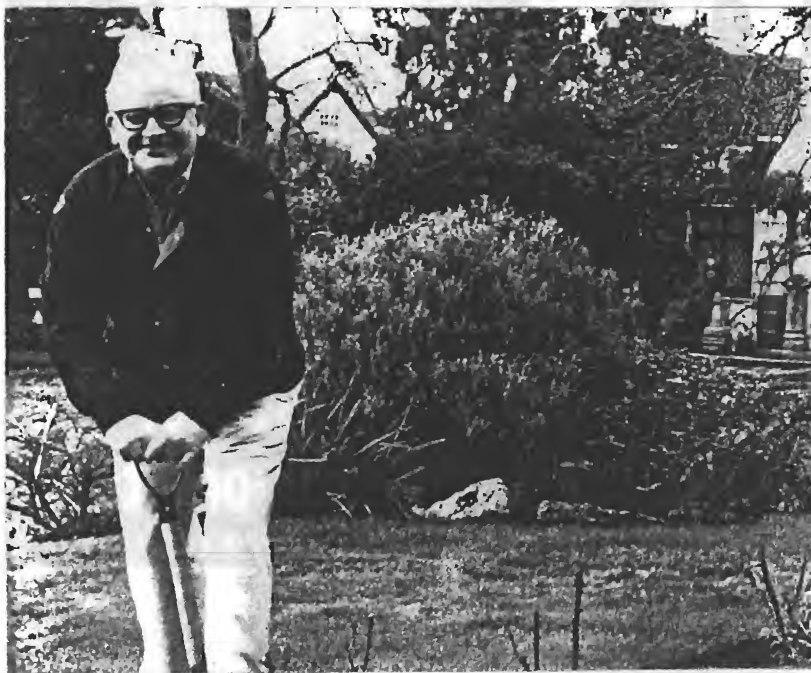
THE comedian Ronnie Barker was cremated yesterday at a humanist funeral service.

The celebrant, Nigel Collins of the British Humanist Association, described the 30-minute service as a "dignified but not sombre" occasion.

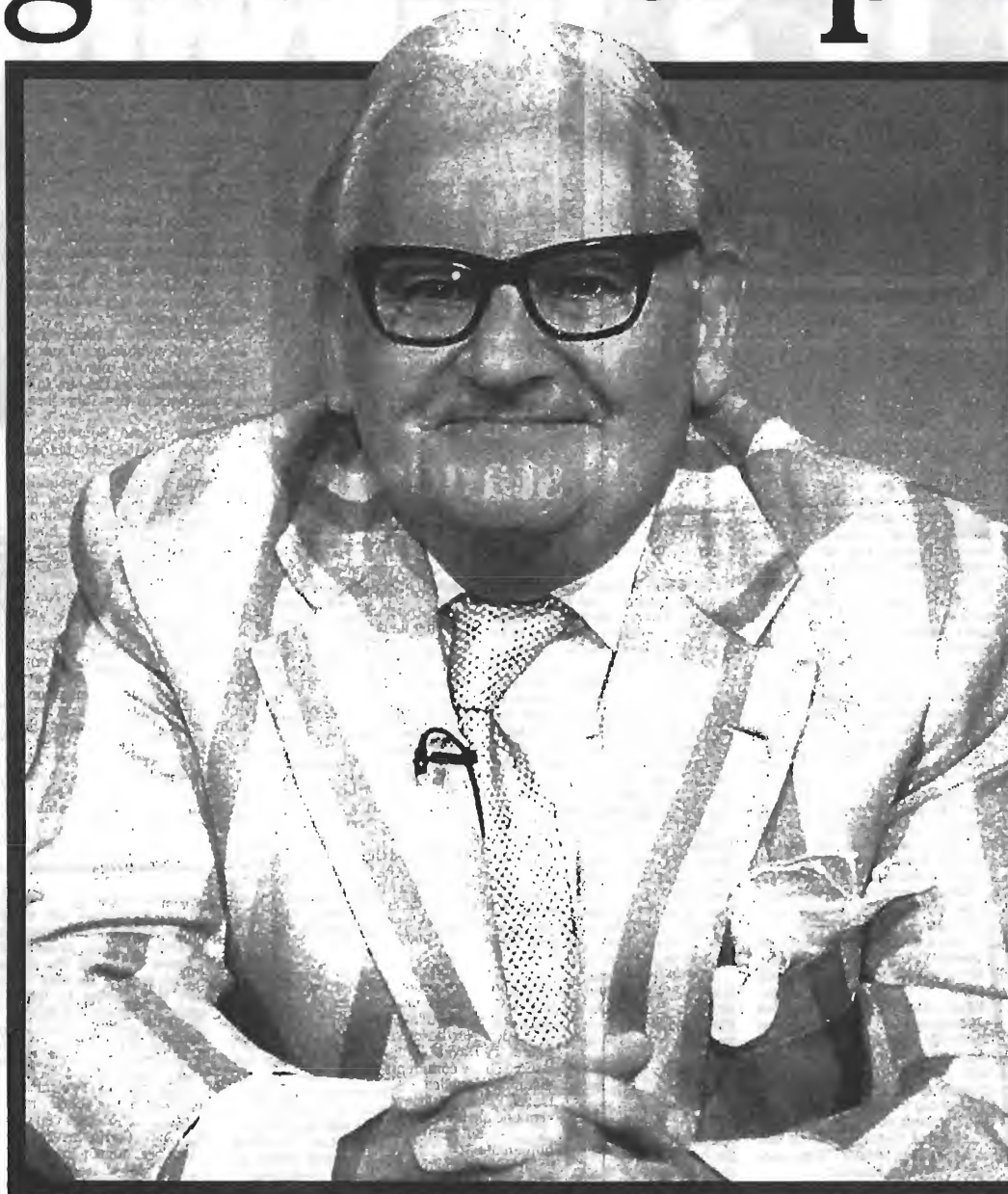
About 30 family members and two or three local friends joined Barker's wife, Joy, 72, their daughter Charlotte and son Larry to say goodbye to the star of *Porridge* and *The Two Ronnies*, who died 10

days ago, aged 76. His other son, Adam, who is wanted by police for child pornography offences, did not attend the service at Banbury crematorium, near the comedian's home village of Dean, Oxon, although there was a police presence.

It was a low-key ceremony and Barker's many friends from the acting world, including his co-star Ronnie Corbett, were expected to attend a larger memorial service, likely to be held in Covent Garden in the New Year.



gold in triplicate



Heard the one about...

THESE are a few of Ronnie Barker's most memorable gags:

The man who invented the zip fastener was today honoured with a life-time peerage. He will now be known as the Lord of the Files.

The toilets at a local police station have been stolen. Police say they have nothing to go on.

In a packed programme tonight we will be talking to an out-of-work contortionist who says he can no longer make ends meet.

Many old music hall fans were present at the funeral today of Fred "Chuckles" Jenkins, Britain's oldest and unfunniest comedian. In tribute, the vicar read out one of Fred's jokes and the congregation had two minutes' silence.

This kitchen appliance completely replaces the milkman, unless you're the woman at 14 Catbury Drive with the green door.

The search for the man who terrorises nudist camps with a bacon slicer goes on. Inspector Lemuel Jones had a tip-off this morning, but hopes to be back on duty tomorrow.

Have you heard the one about the retired general who said he had not had sex since 1956? His friend said, 'That's a long time ago.' 'I don't know,' the general replied, 'It's only 20.27 now.'

A famous Spoonerism from Open All Hours: "Don't just crit their siticising".

Ronnie Corbett, as an ironmonger: "There you are, four candles." Ronnie Barker, the customer: "No, fork 'andles. 'Andles for forks!"

As a prisoner in Porridge, when playing monopoly: "Would you Adam and Eve it? Go to jail!"

Again from Porridge: "What have I learned, Mr Mackay? Three things. One - bide your time. Two - keep your nose clean. And three - don't let the bastards grind you down."

"Come on, you aren't there to play the Warsaw Concerto" - to his assistant Granville (David Jason) who is toying nervously with the cash register in Open All Hours.

He was deeply concerned about his fugitive son



RONNIE Barker was deeply upset over his son's involvement in a police child pornography investigation, veteran Carry On actor Leslie Phillips said last night.

"I know Ronnie suffered because of Adam's situation," said Leslie, 81, a close friend of the comedian.

Ronnie's grieving family last night faced the harrowing task of trying to contact his fugitive son who fled Britain following the police investigation.

Adam Barker, 38, vanished a year

MISSING: Adam Barker hasn't been seen for a year

ago after detectives allegedly discovered 1,200 obscene images on his home computer.

He was questioned by police in connection with Operation Ore, the worldwide investigation into thousands of computer users who allegedly used their credit cards to pay for access to child porn.

Leslie added: "Ronnie was very close to all his children. He was always there for them and enjoyed a good relationship with all of them. He was very close to them in the way a good parent should be."

"Ronnie didn't talk openly about Adam's plight but I know he was

deeply concerned for his welfare and troubled that he had gone missing. Ronnie would have been there for Adam if he'd let him."

"I know he was acutely worried over the outcome of the case if it went to court."

"I doubt if Adam ever contacted him since going missing, but Ronnie would have helped him whatever the crisis."

Adam, who lived alone, was arrested last summer and bailed to appear before magistrates.

However, shortly after the arrest he packed his bags and disappeared from his home in Ealing, west

London. Police last night urged him to hand himself in so matters could be "cleared up" and he could "move on with his life".

There have been a number of sightings of the bachelor - a jobbing actor - including in the south of France. All have proved fruitless.

Adam was not with his mother and sister, Charlotte, 42, at his father's bedside when the comedy star passed away.

It now remains to be seen if he will turn himself in in time for his father's funeral. Should he do so, he will be arrested for his failure to appear in court.

And it's goodnight

From *Porridge* to *The Two Ronnies*, he was a comedy colossus with matchless timing, yet in private Ronnie Barker was a shy man who decided to retire at the peak of his powers

by **Robert Gore-Langton**
and **Simon Edge**

BACK in the days before multi-channel television, when we all watched the same thing on the box every night and then discussed it the next day, Ronnie Barker was the king of comedy. With his portly build and thick glasses, he looked like the bank manager he had once aspired to be. But with his pint-sized comedy partner Ronnie Corbett, who shared his taste in specs as well as his first name, he had the nation in stitches and clocked up audiences of 20 million in a marathon 16-year run.

Even if *The Two Ronnies* had never happened, the enormously talented Barker would still have been a comedy titan thanks to *Porridge*, his prison sitcom in which he played Cockney burglar Fletcher. He always said that was his best work, though the role he enjoyed most was in *Open All Hours*, in which he played a very different kettle of fuh-fuh-fish – the stammering, lustful, skinflint shopkeeper Arkwright.

But it was his double act with Ronnie Corbett that made him a household name. While Corbett went in for rambling monologues, the Barker speciality was sauciness and deadpan verbal dexterity. Sometimes he combined them. "Tickle your botty with a feather tonight?" would change, as a barmaid was about to slap him, to "Particularly grotty weather tonight." Wordplay was the basis of classics such as the hardware shop sketch ("Four candles?" "No, fork 'andles").

The series seemed destined to go on for ever. Then, at the height of his success and earning an estimated £500,000 a year, he packed it in. His retirement – he was not then 60 – took everyone by surprise. "I never wanted them to say, 'He used to be good'," Barker later explained. The truth was, sketch-writing had become a chore and he was terrified he was running dry of material.

By and large, he was as good as his word and there were no comebacks. In the best showbiz tradition, he left them wanting more.

Ronald William George Barker was born in Bedford in 1929. His family – he had two sisters – soon moved to Oxfordshire when his father, a clerk for Shell Oil, was relocated. He took to writing plays for his family and neighbours and often sat in the audience of the Oxford Playhouse, his local repertory company, dreaming of fame.

At 16 he left school and took a job as a bank clerk – but the theatre called. Having made his stage debut in Aylesbury in 1948 at £2.50 a week, he was hired as an actor and stage-hand at the Oxford Playhouse. "I thought, My God, this is what I want to do. I want to make people laugh," he said. He later said the day he took up show-business was the best of his life.

He advised one member of the Oxford company to give up acting because she didn't have the talent. Her name was Maggie Smith.

Another actress colleague was the elegant Joy Tubb. He made her laugh and, after a short courtship, they married in 1957. Their first son Larry was named after their theatrical hero, Laurence Olivier (though, ironically, he is the only one of their three children who has not become an actor).

Barker had appeared in serious plays in London's West End by that time, made his radio debut in *The Floggits* – his stint was short-lived because the show's stars were jealous of the number of laughs he got – and appeared in the classic radio comedy *The Navy Lark*.

His real break came in 1966 on *The Frost Report* where he met Corbett, the only other member of the team who had not been to university. Keen to write, he sent in sketches under the assumed name Gerald Wiley. The material was so good, the team wanted to meet this mysterious contributor and invited

Report) helped enormously. The show ended up with spoof news headlines and the invariable payoff: "It's goodnight from me..." "And it's goodnight from him."

It ran for 98 episodes over 12 series. For years, the pair were asked if their relationship offstage was as amicable as it seemed. "We never had a cross word. If you had major rows with someone, you wouldn't stay together for 20 years," Barker insisted.

The close partnership did not prevent his solo career flourishing, too. *Porridge*, in which he starred alongside Richard Beckinsale, first appeared in 1974. Prince Charles, touring a jail, mistakenly asked if the show was like the real thing. "If only it was," came the anguished reply from the inmates.

A SEQUEL called *Going Straight* failed to capture the same magic but *Open All Hours* was an immediate hit. It was written by Last Of The Summer Wine creator Roy Clarke but the character of Arkwright, forever doing battle with the shop till, was Barker's invention. The show made a star of David Jason as Granville and Barker loved doing it. "Fletcher is the most successful character I've played," he recalled, "but I loved playing Arkwright best, mainly because of David, as he was so funny on and off screen, and we had a whale of a time."

He was awarded three Baftas and an OBE but Ronnie was beginning to tire of television. He feared that his huge success could not last. Sir Peter Hall – who had given him his first West End show – begged him to play Shakespeare's Falstaff at the National Theatre but he turned it down because, he said, he couldn't face the drive home every night.

He retired to his converted water mill in Oxfordshire in 1988. "There was never any doubt when the moment came because I had reached a point when I thought the material just wasn't getting any better. It was simply a matter of 'quit while you're ahead'."

He opened an antiques shop,

partly to get rid of the overspill from his own bric-a-brac collection. He was briefly arrested for receiving stolen goods but ended up getting an apology from the police.

He had a double heart bypass in 1996 and nearly died of a blood clot on his lungs nine months later. He gave up his shop in 1999 but hung on to his collection of 70,000 antique postcards, including some of the "naughty" seaside variety that chimed with his own humour.

He emerged from his semi-reclusive life – he was either the Howard Hughes of Humour or the Greta Garbo of Giggles, as one wag put it – for a *Two Ronnies*

'In 20 years we never had a cross word'

reunion show in 1999. Albert Finney persuaded him to appear as his screen manservant in the award-winning drama about Winston Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, in 2002. He said the worst part was having to learn lines again: "They are not difficult but I am out of practice. I haven't learnt lines for 14 years." He also took a small part in the film *My House in Umbria*, with Maggie Smith.

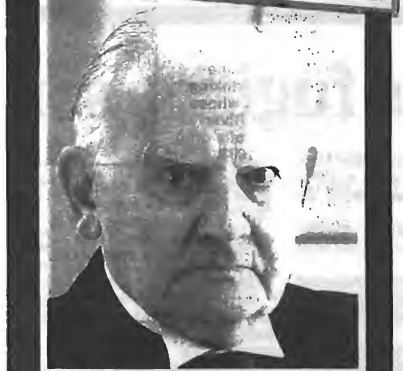
This year he teamed up with Corbett again to present a greatest hits series, *The Two Ronnies Sketchbook*.

His son Larry went into advertising. Daughter Charlotte became an actress and, in 1998, Ronnie wrote a fringe play, *Mum*, for her to perform in. (He noted that it received "the worst reviews in the history of theatre".)

Barker's younger son Adam, who looks most like his father, also became an actor but caused his father great grief when he fled abroad after being arrested by Scotland Yard's paedophile squad. He is believed still to be on the run. Ronnie Corbett said yesterday he would always miss his friend: "Ronnie was pure gold in triplicate, as a performer, a writer and a friend."

"We worked together since 1965 and we never had a cross word. It was 40 years of harmonious joy, nothing but an absolute pleasure."

● **Ronnie Barker**, born September 29, 1929, in Bedford. Died October 3, 2005, in Oxfordshire, aged 76.



TALENT: From top, Barker's big break on *The Frost Report*; with David Jason in *Open All Hours*; with Richard Beckinsale in *Porridge* and in *The Gathering Storm* film

ht from him



PHENOMENON: Corbett and Barker attracted 20 million viewers



CLASS ACT: Barker in one of his many female guises for The Two Ronnies



LAUGHING MATTER: The Two Ronnies showcased a wealth of comic characters during 12 series of the hit BBC show



Daily Mail, Wednesday, October 5, 2005

V3



...and it's goodnight from him.

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Schumacher
should retire

Sport Page 7

Simon Jenkins:
The 'scarcely
believable' Tory
leadership contest

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the guardian

Tories need rightwing agenda - Davis

Michael White
Political editor

David Davis will seek today to consolidate his frontrunner status in the Tory leadership contest by telling his party conference to stop apologising for its record and unite behind "timeless" rightwing principles that can sweep them back to power.

The battle burst into life on the Blackpool conference floor yesterday when Mr Davis's centre-left rivals, David Cameron and Kenneth Clarke, threw down the gauntlet - and called on the Tories to recapture the centre ground from New Labour.

That leaves the shadow home secretary needing to make his own speech in the Blackpool political beauty contest the most important of his career when he attempts to prove he has the charisma and the intellectual weight to win decisively by the time MPs and activists have had their say on December 6.

As the man with most to lose, Mr Davis, 56, now finds himself under acute pressure. He has the support of nearly 70 MPs, almost enough to guarantee a place in the final round when activists will choose between the two leading candidates. Failure today to make a sufficient mark could start a landslide to his more polished

rivals. His speech on the conference fringe on Monday won a lukewarm response.

Aides revealed last night three of the crucial points Mr Davis plans to make as he gently repudiates his rivals' centre-ground call. "Rightwing methods to achieve the goals of One Nation Toryism," was how insiders put it. "Let's stop apologising and get on with the job," Mr Davis will tell the conference after two days of being told how bad their plight is after eight years in opposition.

But, as Liam Fox, the only candidate trying to outflank Mr Davis on the right, raises the stakes, Mr Davis will seek to soften today's message by reminding the conference they must be a "party of power with a moral purpose". The former council estate boy will declare: "For us government is a means, not an end in itself. It is about the means to liberate those locked into deprivation, to enfranchise those whose views go unheard and to empower those who cannot fight back."

Dr Fox, the shadow foreign secretary, will step up his bid to emerge the darling of activists and rightwing MPs who mistrust Mr Davis. The policies were right in 2005, but were not sold to voters; the country must change, not the party, he will say - after yesterday declaring a willingness to leave the EU if it does not change too.

10»

Warders carrying staves

Staff at Britain's biggest immigration centres are using staves to intimidate detainees in a practice criticised today by the chief inspector of prisons. Anne Owers says the use of 30cm wooden staves is unacceptable, given that they are banned in low-security jails in England and Wales.

Staves are being used in the immigration removal centres at Dover and Haslar, near Portsmouth, which hold failed asylum seekers. "Their routine deployment in a centre holding those not convicted of

any offence is intimidating," Ms Owers tells the home secretary, Charles Clarke.

Prison Service rules state they can be drawn only in exceptional circumstances but Ms Owers points out that a staff member had drawn his staff in one of the five incidents at Haslar where force had been used. Last night the Home Office defended the practice, insisting that the risk assessment at Dover and Haslar made it necessary.

4»
Alan Travis



Ronnie Barker's final goodnight



Mark Lawson

With fifty years' experience of wordplay and punch lines, Ronnie Barker, who has died aged 76, knew that few obituarists and headline writers would be able to resist a twist on his celebrated trick signoff with Ronnie Corbett on *The Two Ronnies*: "It's goodnight from me ... and it's goodnight from him."

But, behind the gut instinct for belly laughs that made him the most

accomplished comic actor of his generation, Barker was obsessed with the timing of that final goodnight. Fear of an early death had shaped his career and robbed viewers of nearly two decades of potential performances.

The actor had retired from television in 1987, concerned by the heart-related deaths on stage of his peers Eric Morecambe and Leonard Rossiter and the premature loss from a coronary of Richard Beckinsale, his co-star in the prison sitcom *Porridge*, aged only 31.

Already suffering questionable blood pressure, an alarmed Barker became a very rare example of a performer who walks away while still in high demand.

Three years ago, presumably concluding that the risk of dying very young was receding, the then 73-year-old Barker unexpectedly returned to play Winston Churchill's valet opposite Albert Finney in the award-winning TV drama *The Gathering Storm* and then a dyspeptic general in the film *My House in Umbria*.

Television, though, was where Barker had been most missed and, last year, he reunited with Corbett to introduce favourite songs and sketches from their series between 1971 and 1986 in *The Two Ronnies Sketchbook*. But the heart problems the actor had long anticipated now occurred and he announced his retirement once more.

Those *Ronnies* anthologies drew huge audiences, bringing the double entendres and spoof songs of the pair to a new generation, and proved that Barker's self-imposed exile had not affected his reputation, although his re-run and DVD immortality is likely to come less from *The Two Ronnies* than from *Porridge*, the Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais comedy in which, from 1974 to 1977, he played canny old lag Norman Stanley Fletcher serving a five-year stretch.

Almost all British sitcoms are about

Continued on page 2 »

Obituaries

Ronnie Barker

A master of comic acting and writing, he entertained millions with a potent mixture of pyrotechnic puns, surreal misbehaviour and crosschat

It says much about the changing character of British television that Ronnie Barker, one of its most creative comic talents, should have voluntarily turned his back on the medium long before he died at the age of 76. One of the questions posed when commentators first foresaw the emergence of committee-concocted shows to fill market niches was what would happen to the truly talented. A cynical observer suggested that "they'll go off and run antique shops." Which is precisely what Barker – co-star of *The Two Ronnies*, star of the corner-shop comedy series *Open All Hours* and of the prison comedy *Porridge* – did.

Still less than 60, and at the height of his fame when he announced his retirement in 1987, he commanded audience of more than 15 million people for those three series; he also wrote most of the material for *The Two Ronnies*, and much else, under the pen-names of Gerald Wiley, Jonathan Cobbald or Jack Goetz. Both as an actor and a writer, he was recognised as a master of pyrotechnic puns, surreal misbehaviour in public and private places, and crackling crosschat. "I refuse to be one of the still-with-us brigade," he explained enigmatically.

The only real clue to Barker's departure was that his last comedy series, *Clarence*, broadcast in 1988, about a shortsighted removal man, had been his least successful. But he could easily have survived one flop if he had still been in sympathy with the thrust of British television. In fact, he loathed the trend towards crudity and the sexually explicit. Always a prickly interviewee, he did not make public many of his adverse views – or the fact that he suffered from high blood pressure and had had heart surgery.

He did come back briefly, appearing with his former co-star Ronnie Corbett at the Royal Variety Performance in 1997. The BBC celebrated *Two Ronnies* with a reunion night in 1999, and earlier this year with a four-week series in which Barker and Corbett presented their classic, tightly scripted sketches. As an actor, Barker appeared as the butler to Albert Finney's Winston Churchill in the

BBC drama *The Gathering Storm* (2002), and as a general in the television film of a William Trevor novella, *My House in Umbria* (2003).

In 1998 he wrote a play for his actor daughter, Charlotte. Simply called *Mum*, it was produced at the King's Head pub theatre in Islington, and had elements of tragedy as well as comedy, since its main character was an office cleaner whose life was so lonely that she talked constantly to her dead mother. There was always a hint of unpredictable bleakness, or even menace, behind Barker's toothy forensic accountant's smile that gave his work tension as well as credibility.

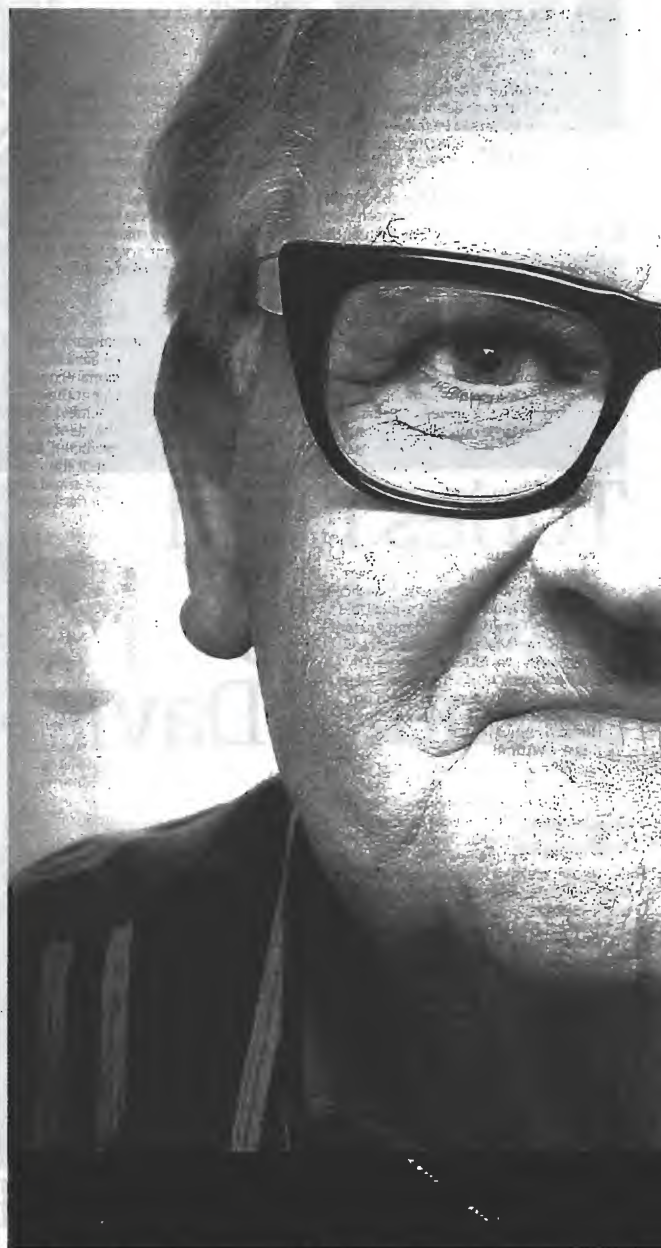
But his background was mundane enough. Born in Bedford, Barker lived in Oxford from the age of four, went to the high school there, was a member of St James' church choir and was, for five dissatisfied months, a student of architecture. His first job was as a bank clerk at £1.9s (£1.45) a week. Though he toyed with the idea of going on to become a bank manager, the closest he eventually came was through parodying the role, as he did so effectively with other middle-class professions. However, he had also been performing and stage managing with amateur dramatic societies for 18 months when he left to go into the professional theatre.

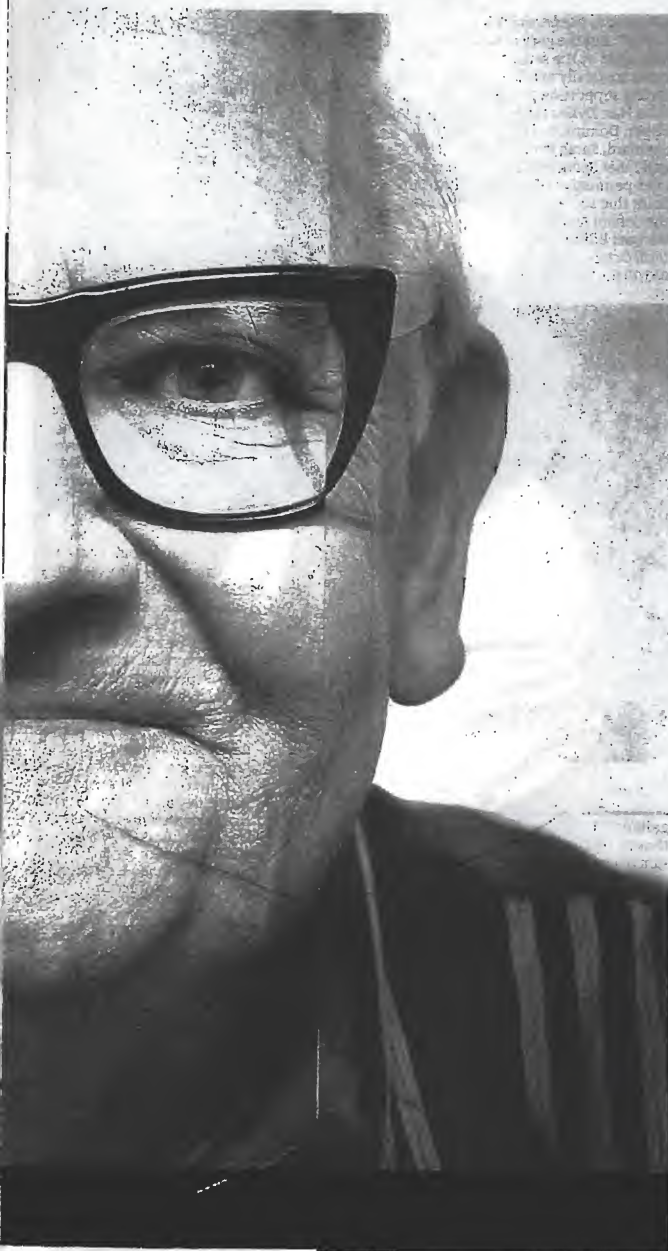
He failed to get into the Young Vic school in London, and his first paid stage job was in the Aylesbury Repertory Company for £2.50 a week, after he had read a script with six different accents. He made his acting debut in JM Barrie's *Quality Street*, followed by the part of the organist in JB Priestley's *When We Are Married*. He lived with his parents, or in digs in Aylesbury, the cost of which left him a few pennies a week to live on. His father, an oil company clerk, had told him that he would not support him if he chose to become an actor.

It was 1948, and the golden era of British weekly rep, in which actors had to deal with three plays in various states of preparation at once, and could thoroughly learn their trade. The regular public had their own favourite players, who socialised off-stage, producing a community spirit if no great financial rewards. Years later, Barker drew a vivid picture of this lost world in his memoir, *Dancing in the Moonlight* (1993).

In his third role at Aylesbury, Barker discovered his suitability for comedy. Playing Charles the chauffeur in *Miranda*, a play about a mermaid who falls in love with a human, he got his first big laugh. "I want to make people laugh,"

Before Peter Hall gave him his West End break in 1955, Barker had worked in rep and, for four weeks, as a hospital porter





he said. "Never mind about Hamlet. Forget Richard the Second. Give me Charley's Aunt. My mission in life was now crystal clear."

He played a comic policeman in the pantomime *Little Red Riding Hood* and three parts in *Treasure Island*. His first starring part was in the socially significant but popular comedy by William Chetham Stode, *The Guinea Pig*, in which he played the first working-class boy to go to a public school, and eventually to find acceptance there. When the production was sent to Rhyl, north Wales, Barker heard that Aylesbury Rep was to close, but was himself later briefly employed at Rhyl – until that company, too, was disbanded. After four weeks of "resting" (working as a porter at the Wingfield hospital, Headington), he joined a mime company, which went

'Never mind about Hamlet. Forget about Richard the Second. Give me Charley's Aunt'

broke in Penzance, leaving him to hitch-hike back to Oxford.

He became character juvenile and stage manager for the Famous Players at Bramhall in Cheshire, replacing Roy Dotrice. Glynn Melville, the leading man, later appeared in his own broad comedy, *The Love Match*, with Arthur Askey as the star; later, Melville asked Barker to tour in it as the stammering hero. Still later, Melville employed Barker to write a TV series for him; and years after that, Barker's stammering skills came in handy for the TV series *Open All Hours* (1973-85).

But it was Oxford Playhouse that established Barker as an actor. In the circus comedy *He Who Gets Slapped*, he played the clown to great applause. After that, the closure of repertory companies grew increasingly frequent and he felt he was not only in a rut, but a very insecure rut. Then the arrival of the 21-year-old Peter Hall to direct at Oxford in 1952 changed the drift of his life; after Hall became director of the Arts Theatre, London, in 1955, he invited Barker to make his West End debut, as the Chanty-man and Joe Silva in Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Hall continued to encourage him to appear in the West End.

Thus Barker's London stage work continued, mainly in revues, and, from 1959, he was Able-bodied Seaman Johnson in 300 editions of the *Navy Lark* on BBC radio, alongside Jon Pertwee and Leslie Phillips. His big break in television came through playing feature parts with June Whitfield in a series starring

the bluffly popular comedian "Professor" Jimmy Edwards, *Seven Faces of Jim*. A year later, in 1966, came David Frost's *The Frost Report*, on which Barker first worked with Ronnie Corbett, Peter Cook and John Cleese. Frost later featured Barker and Corbett in tandem in his *Frost On Sunday* show (1968). Thereafter, in quick succession, Barker was in *Hark at Barker* (1969), *Six Dates with Barker* (1971) and, most significantly, the *Two Ronnies*, of which 98 episodes were shown over 12 series between 1971 and 1987. He starred with Corbett in various varieties of sketch and crosschat, largely of his own devising. The series was often repeated; it also ran for a while, live, at the London Palladium in 1978, and toured Australia.

Then came *Porridge* (1973-77), the first television comedy to be set in a prison. Barker played the wily, non-violent old lag Fletcher, always trying to get the better of other imprisoned villains and the prison staff. *Open All Hours*, in which he played the tight-fisted and lecherous Arkwright, keeper of the corner shop battling for survival, sealed his reputation as an actor who could make comedy roles sympathetic as well as funny.

Regarded as a "safe" performer by those at the BBC who regarded bad language and the sexually explicit as "realistic", Barker acquired over the years some 40,000 naughty Victorian postcards showing naked or nearly naked ladies doing their best to hide their confusion. He even wrote a book about them, *Ronnie Barker's Book of Bathing Beauties* (1974). In a sense, they were an epitaph to his preference for innuendo over the crudely explicit, a calculated and inviting restraint which assumed some intelligence and imagination in the audience and was the essence of his zany comedy.

Though he once turned down an award because it would have meant making an eight-minute speech of acceptance – he was always uneasy when speaking as himself rather than in character – Barker was the winner of many awards. They included those of the Variety Club of Great Britain three times (in 1969, 1974 and 1980), a rare achievement; of the Radio Industry Club in 1973, 1974, 1977 and 1981; and of the British Academy of Film and Television Arts in 1975, 1977 and 1978, with a Bafta tribute evening to him in 2004. He gained the OBE in 1978.

He married Joy Tubb in 1957. She survives him, as do Charlotte and their sons Adam and Larry.

Dennis Barker

Ronald William George Barker, comedy actor and writer, born September 25 1929; died October 3 2005



And it's goodnight from him ...

Xan Brooks

Generations of British entertainers rose as one to bid a fond goodnight to Ronnie Barker yesterday, with tributes ranging from John Cleese, who appeared alongside Barker in the 60s satire *The Frost Report*, through to Peter Kay, the 32-year-old star of *Phoenix Nights*.

"He made me laugh so much and I'm just so lucky to have been able to get to know my hero and the person that I aspire to be," said Kay, who was a guest at a Bafta tribute to Barker last December. "Just like with Eric Morcambe, you feel as though you've lost a dear friend."

The eulogies were testament to the actor's long, varied and influential career in British television. Born in Bedford in 1929, Barker honed his craft on stage, working with Oxford's Playhouse Theatre and the Manchester Repertory Company before making his radio debut in the BBC sitcom *The Navy Lark*.

But TV was to prove a natural home, with a string of credits beginning with the satirical 1960s sketch show *The Frost Report* and extending through *The Two Ronnies* and the cherished BBC sitcoms *Porridge* and *Open All Hours*.

John Cleese, who had his big break acting alongside Barker on *The Frost Report*, yesterday remembered "a warm, friendly and encouraging presence to have when I started in television".

Cleese's fellow Python Michael Palin described Barker as "a straightforward, down-to-earth man who had this extraordinary ability to make the nation laugh — probably more often than anyone else I know."

David Jason, who co-starred as Barker's shop assistant in *Open All Hours*, said that he was shocked to learn

'Working with Ronnie was always a joy [they] were some of the best years of my career'

David Jason

of the comic's death. "He was a very dear friend and someone for whom I had the greatest respect. Working with Ronnie was always a joy and were without doubt some of the best years of my career." Ronnie Corbett, his stablemate through 12 series and 16 years of *The Two Ronnies*, described him as "pure gold in triplicate", while BBC chairman Michael Grade said: "We have lost a national treasure."

Friends and colleagues paid tribute to Barker's common touch and innate comic timing. "There was a rhythm to a joke and he was able to show how that worked," said *Two Ronnies* producer Michael Hurll. "It worked every time." Des O'Connor said: "Ronnie was such a brilliant and versatile actor, a superb comedian and a wonderful wordsmith. City toff, country yokel — all his characters were so brilliantly observed and so believable."

"He was not only a great comedian but a great actor," said theatre director Sir Peter Hall, who spotted Barker when he was a part-time actor and assistant stage manager in Manchester. In 1987, Barker announced he was quitting showbusiness to run an antiques shop in the Cotswolds. He was, however, periodically lured out of retirement. His last TV appearance found him reunited with Ronnie Corbett as co-host of *The Two Ronnies Sketchbook* this year.

But yesterday's tributes painted a portrait of a quiet, private man who never grew accustomed to the limelight that accompanied his success. "He was very shy," recalled broadcaster Michael Parkinson. "A man uneasy with the fame that came with the job. A man who liked to observe in the shade. He reminded me of Alec Guinness in that sense. But, my word, when he stood centre stage you'd better watch him."

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Guardian Unlimited

The best of Barker

» Ronnie Barker's greatest gags » A life in pictures » Read tributes and have your say on our blog



The wit of Barker His best (or worst) gags

"In a packed programme tonight we will be talking to an out-of-work contortionist who says he can no longer make ends meet."

"The search for the man who terrorises nudist camps with a bacon slicer goes on. Inspector Lemuel Jones had a tip-off this morning, but hopes to be back on duty tomorrow."

"Have you heard the one about the retired general who said he had not had sex since 1956? His friend said, 'That's a long time ago.' 'I don't know,' the general replied. 'It's only 20.27 now'."

"The toilets at a local police station have been stolen. Police say they have nothing to go on."

"Don't just crit there shticising." (as Arkwright, the speech-impaired shopkeeper in *Open All Hours*)

Ronnie Corbett, as an ironmonger: "There you are, four candles." Ronnie Barker, the customer: "No, fork 'andles. 'Andles for forks!"

"What do you call it when an Arab terrorist drives a plane into some wood? Pine eleven." (attracting controversy to his last TV appearance on 2005's *The Two Ronnies Sketchbook*)

"There was a strange happening during a performance of Elgar's Sea Pictures at a concert hall in Bermuda tonight, when the man playing the triangle disappeared."

Ronnie Corbett: "It's goodnight from me ..."
Ronnie Barker: "And it's goodnight from him."

The many faces of Barker
Top: With Ronnie Corbett in *The Two Ronnies*. Second row from left: With Corbett and John Cleese in *The Frost Report*; with David Jason in *Open All Hours* and a routine from *The Two Ronnies*. Above: With Fulton Mackay and Richard Beckinsale in *Porridge*. Left: with his wife Joy, and the man himself

G2 05.10.05

Erwin James Doing time with Porridge

Norman Stanley Fletcher... you are an habitual criminal who accepts arrest as an occupational hazard and presumably accepts imprisonment in the same casual manner..." So says the Judge at the beginning of each episode of *Porridge* – the celebrated prison sitcom set in fictional HMP Slade – as he sentences "lovable rogue" Norman Fletcher to five years' imprisonment.

We never learned exactly what it was that Fletcher did to warrant his five stretch, but thanks to the late Ronnie Barker – whose death was announced yesterday – and his finely detailed portrayal of the character, neither did we particularly care. What concerned fans of the show was the way that Fletcher coped with his circumstances. In spite of his unapologetic criminality, incorrigible Fletcher epitomised the little guy who, with the odds stacked against him, constantly fights against an intransigent system (represented in the main by Prison Officer Mackay, played in some style by the late Fulton Mackay).

What fans could never know, however, unless they had been subjected to a stint of Her Majesty's Pleasure, was that the conflict between Fletcher and Officer Mackay, was about the most authentic depiction ever of the true relationship that exists between prisoners and prison officers in British jails up and down the country. (Prison officers might disagree, but of course, they would.) I'm not sure how, but writers Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais understood that it is almost the duty of a prisoner to best the landing officer, the cleaning officer, the workshop officer. Somehow they tapped into the otherwise impenetrable world of imprisonment and brought it to life with sparkling dialogue and cracking story lines. They grasped the notion that it is the minor victories against the naturally oppressive prison system that makes prison life bearable.

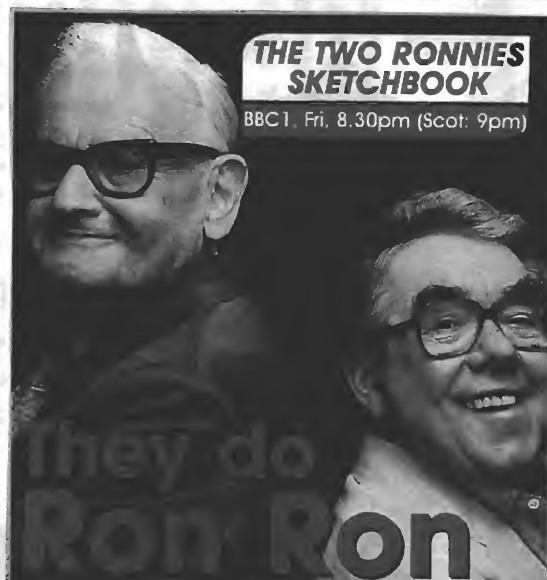
When I was inside, *Porridge* was a staple of our TV diet. In one high-security prison a video orderly would be dispatched to tape the programme each week. If they missed it, they were in trouble. My favourite was the episode in which Fletcher managed to "acquire" the prison governor's soft toilet paper and replace it with the hard

stuff reserved for the cons. In real life, this would have been a glorious victory indeed. Anyone who spends time on a prison landing soon realises that the prison experience has very little to do with any crime that may have been committed to warrant it. Clement and La Frenais had this insight and populated their prison with characters who even today would be recognisable on any prison wing in the country. But without the genius of Ronnie Barker, I doubt that the escapades of Fletcher and his rogues gallery of likable lag chums (Heslop, Harris, Crusher, Scrounger, Grouty, and, in particular, first time offender Lennie Godber) would have been quite so believable. Prisons now have managers with the unenviable title of head of purposeful activity. Prisoners refer to them as the heads of purposeless activity. Fletcher would have understood ●



THE TWO RONNIES SKETCHBOOK

BBC1, Fri. 8.30pm (Scot: 9pm)



A charming letter from Mrs Betty J Gudgin of Luton reminded us this week of the genius of the Two Ronnies' Four Candles sketch. And, appropriately, that very skit is the highlight of the final instalment of the duo's greatest moments.

Barker plays a gruff labourer who places an order in a hardware store for four candles. Except it's not, as what he really wants are 'fork andles', and confusion reigns from there on in.

Also ticking our funnybones on Friday are the Laundry Chute sketch and the Phantom Raspberry Blower Of Old London Town. Their salad days may be long gone, but with sketches like these the duo (above) still hit the spot...

Shortcuts

THE TWO RONNIES SKETCHBOOK

BBC1, Fri, 9pm



THE TWO RONNIES SKETCHBOOK

BBC1, 8.30pm

● Singer Renee Olstead performs *Midnight At The Oasis* while the comedy duo (above) present sketches including *The Identical Dialogue Party*, *Real Water*, *Towels/Tiles* and *Rhyming Vicar*.

THE TWO RONNIES SKETCHBOOK

BBC1, 9pm

● The comedy duo (above) look back on their favourite sketches, including *Opticians*, *Allotment* and *Boring Accountant*, in this retrospective series.



At one end of the cavernous studio, sunk in the floor, is a tank filled with insubrious green water. The producer **James Gilbert** explains that it is to be used later in the day for a 'quickie.'

A 'quickie' is between ten and sixty seconds long. Some—like the one **Ronnie Corbett** (left) is making—are really film versions of the cartoons you see in magazines. Dressed in sweat-stained Desert Rat's rig complete with sun helmet he staggers across a raised bed of sand in one corner of the studio over and over again until the cameraman and director are satisfied. Then at his last gasp he falls and begins to write a memorable postcard . . .

This particular 'quickie,' if used, will go in tonight's show which is about holidays. Postcards are part of the holiday myth and so are those interminable holiday films people inflict on their friends. **Ronnie Barker** (right) has been waiting patiently in another corner of the studio to make a trailer for one of these. He is sitting in a swivel chair in front of a living-room set. He selects a pair of horn-rimmed glasses from a brown paper bag, and puts on his most impressive face and voice.

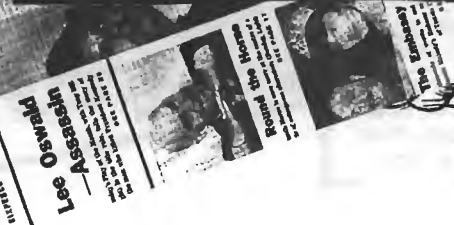
He and James Gilbert work for quite a time on a simple-seeming piece of movement—getting up from the desk, selecting a book, and sitting down again. Then he begins in best Otto Preminger style: 'We at 3a Horsemole Street are very proud of this Motion Picture . . .

If you want to find out more about this epic watch *The Frost Report* tonight. **BERNARD ADAMS**

ONE of the points to remember about *The Frost Report* is that when it goes off you hear the bang almost as soon as you see the flash: in short it is a live show. When you see him on the screen D. Frost is really at that moment talking to you from a studio, but some of the items he introduces have been prepared on film long beforehand. This usually happens at Ealing Studios in London and that was where I went fully three weeks ago to see how it is done . . .

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NUMBER 5,918



28-page supplement inside

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BROADWATER FARM, OCTOBER 1985

Racial tension on
a north London
estate erupts into
riots, culminating
in the killing of
PC Keith Blakelock

Multicultural Britain: An unlikely success story

BROADWATER FARM, OCTOBER 2005

The estate is now
home to 39 different
nationalities, crime
is down, and a big
investment in
facilities has paid off

FULL STORY, PAGE 2

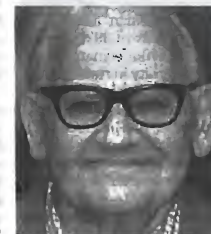


HOME
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Clarke and
Cameron
play Tory
generation
game

HOME
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The one
and only
Ronnie
Barker dies
aged 76



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Revealed:
city with the
best quality
of life in
the world

SPORT
BACK PAGE

Injured
Cole to miss
England's
vital World
Cup week

THE ONE AND ONLY RONNIE



Ronnie Barker was one of the greatest comedians Britain has produced. **Brian Viner** remembers a writer and actor who combined a gigantic talent with a very modest demeanour

Death of a comedy icon

The phrase "national treasure" is bandied about with diminishing discernment these days, but if Ronnie Barker wasn't a national treasure, then nor are *The Fighting Temeraire* by J M W Turner, Stonehenge and the spire of Salisbury Cathedral.

Barker, whose death on Monday at the age of 76 came as a shock even to those friends who knew he was suffering from a recurrence of heart trouble, was a colossus of television comedy, perhaps even its pre-eminent colossus, in that he mastered all its forms - the sitcom, the sketch show and the gag-laden monologue direct to camera - both as performer and writer.

Ronnie Corbett led the tributes to his erstwhile comedy partner, saying: "Ronnie was pure gold in triplicate, as a performer, a writer and a friend. We worked together since 1965 and we never had a cross word. It was 40 years of harmonious joy, nothing but an absolute pleasure. I will miss him terribly."

To some extent, we all will. After all, Barker was that extraordinarily rare animal: a funny man who made everyone laugh. There are those who remained resolutely untickled by Spike Milligan and even Tommy Cooper;

others who are immune to the ramblings of Billy Connolly and Eddie Izzard. But only a statue could sit stony-faced through the comedic output of Ronnie Barker, from sketch-based shows such as *The Frost Report* and *The Two Ronnies*, to his classic turns as the resourceful jailbird Fletcher in *Porridge* and the devious, stammering grocer Arkwright in *Open All Hours*.

Maybe only Eric Morecambe shared Barker's quality; the one which makes all of us feel, with his departure, as though the world is suddenly a smidgin less jolly. "I can only think that God must have needed cheering up," said the comedy writer and actor Craig Cash yesterday. "He had

flawless comic timing", said Michael Palin, who worked with Barker on *The Frost Report*. "I never saw him blow a sketch. But he was quite self-contained. It was hard to write collaboratively with him. You'd write a piece and he would change it to what he knew he could do brilliantly. He was modest, never ambitious or pushy, but he knew what he did well."

What Barker did not do remotely well was egomania. I once saw him slipping quietly away from a BBC party and, against all my better instincts, rushed over to shake a doughy hand, just so that I could tell him how much pleasure he had given me. He was embarrassed and a little flus-

tered by this attention from a complete stranger, and as an unassuming man he would have been touched but perhaps similarly flustered by all the lavish tributes in the pages of today's newspapers, as well as on last night's television news and on the BBC website, which invited people yesterday to contribute their favourite Barker lines.

Within minutes they were flying across cyberspace, mostly lifted from *The Two Ronnies*, such as: "In a packed show tonight we'll be talking to an out-of-work contortionist who can no longer make ends meet," and "The search for the man who terrorises nudist camps with a bacon slicer goes on. Inspector Lemuel Jones had a tip-off this morning, but hopes to be back on duty tomorrow."

Some of the best lines in the show - which ran for 15 years to adoring audiences regularly approaching 20 million - were written by Gerald Wiley, the pseudonym invented by Barker when he started submitting sketches to *The Frost Report*, on the basis that the unknown Mr Wiley's material would be judged entirely on its own merits.

However, the ruse also appealed to his sense of mischief, and whenever the team speculated as to who this fellow Wiley might really be - Noel Coward, Tom Stoppard and even Terence Rattigan were three half-serious guesses - Barker eagerly joined in. Famously, he then decided to come clean by writing in as Gerald Wiley and inviting everyone to a Chinese restaurant to meet him. Only when they were all assembled did he blow his own cover, but the talented Mr Wiley

Laughter lines

■ **THE TWO RONNIES**
Mastermind Spoof. Answering the question before last: Barker: What would you use a rip cord to open?

Corbett: Large files
Barker: Correct. What sort of person lived in Bedlam?

Corbett: A parachute
Barker: Correct. What is a jock strap?

Corbett: A nut case

■ **"In a packed programme tonight, we will be talking to an out of work contortionist who's failing to make ends meet"**

■ **"The toilets at a local police station have been stolen. Police say they have nothing to go on"**

■ **PISMIRONUNCIATION:**
"So you see how dickyfelt it is."

But help is at hand. A new society has been formed by our mumblers to help each other in times of excrement ices. It is balled Pismronouncers Unanimous, and anyone can ball them up on the smellyphone any time of the day or note, twenty four flowers a spray, seven stays a creek, and they will come round and get drunk with you'

■ **OPEN ALL HOURS**
Arkwright: What can I do you for?

Nurse Gladys: Two packets of peppermints.

Arkwright: Well, that sounds very reasonable. I accept

Granville: I wonder if I'll ever find time to get married?

Arkwright: Why bother? Your father never did

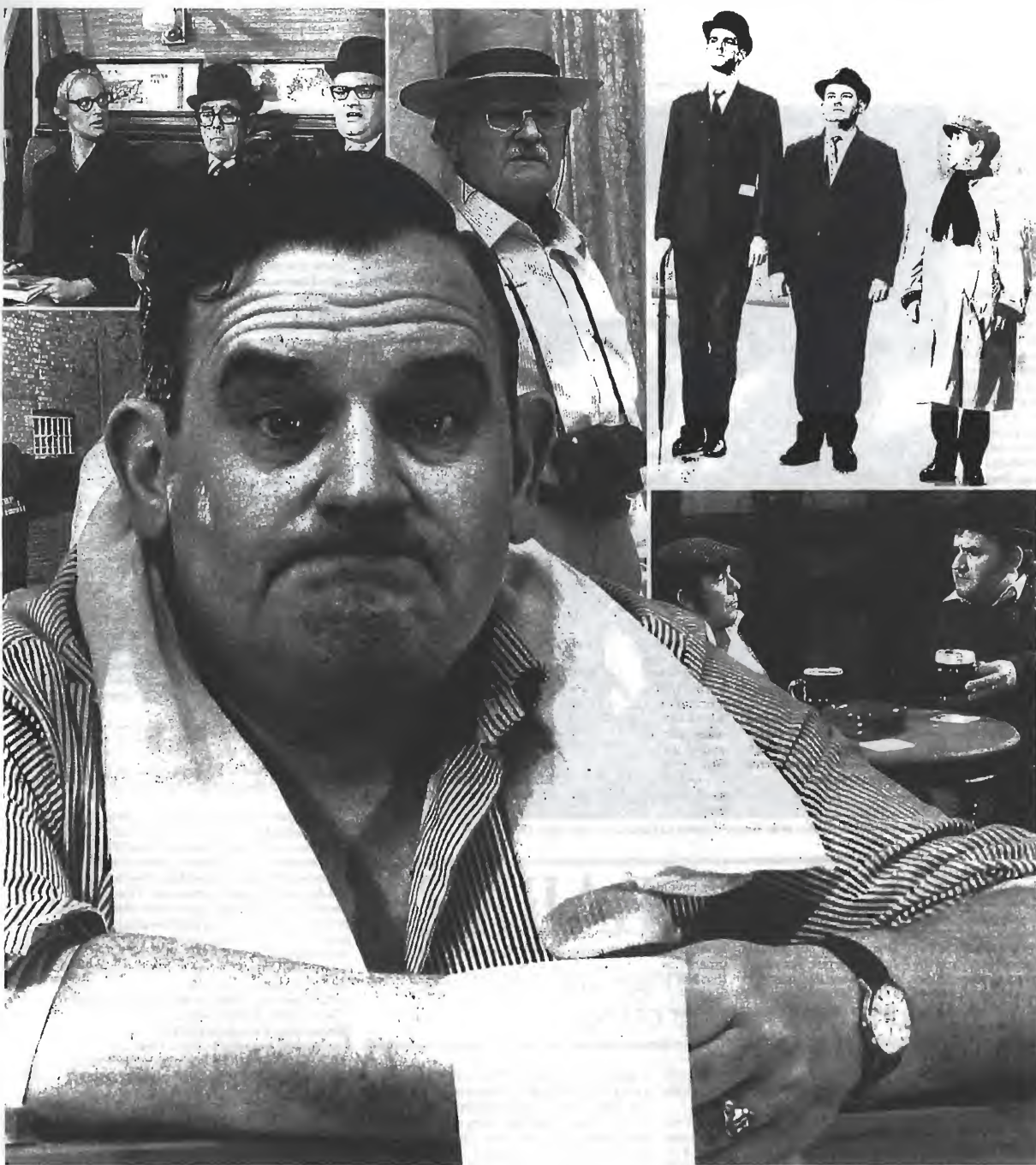
continued to write some of the finest sketches in *The Two Ronnies*, including the celebrated one in a hardware shop. "There you are, four candles!" "No, fork handles... handles for forks!" Not to mention the *Loyal Society for the Relief of Sufferers Of Pismronunciation*, "for people who cannot say their worms correctly".

For all his modesty, Barker was proud to be cited as a massive influence by modern stars such as Peter Kay, who once told me that, when he went on holiday to Majorca, he did nothing much more than sit beside the swimming pool listening to *Porridge* tapes on his headphones. When Kay wrote to Barker to say that

his performance as Fletcher had informed his own comedy, Barker wrote back on Slade prison notepaper. He was a funny man off screen as well as on.

"But he was funny in such an understated way," said the writer David Renwick. "There was nothing loud or exuberant about his humour, he was just instantaneously witty. He was one of the very few people I've met - in fact I can only think of Eric Morecambe and Peter Cook - whose wit was that quick. But it was never to show off, it was just to make you smile."

Renwick it was who wrote one of *The Two Ronnies'* most fondly remembered sketches, the *Mas-*



termind sketch in which the specialist subject is answering the question before last. "I remember the night we recorded it, I'd completely lost faith in it," he recalled. "And Ronnie, who understood the audience as much as anyone ever can, was quite nervous too as to whether they would be able to follow it. In the end it was decided to record the sketch twice, once so that the audience got the idea, and again to get the laughs. But they only did it once, to huge laughs."

"Ronnie's timing was so wonderful that it worked immediately, and it was an immense privilege to have written for him at the height of his powers. And, of

course, for Ronnie Corbett too. What made them so brilliant together was that Corbett was a comedian with a gift for acting and Barker was an actor with a gift for comedy."

Those comic gifts were such that Barker's skills as a straight actor were underused, even though they never went unrecognised. As butler to Albert Finney's Sir Winston Churchill in the excellent television film *The Gathering Storm*, he was unobtrusively splendid, as of course a good butler should be.

But that - and a one-woman play Barker wrote for his daughter Charlotte, one of his three children - represented a rare

Clockwise from top left: Ronnie Barker in *The Gathering Storm*; Frost on *Sunday*; *My House in Umbria*; with John Cleese and Ronnie Corbett in *The Frost Report*; *Porridge*; *Open All Hours* and *The Two Ronnies*

foray out of retirement. Barker decided to retire in 1987 partly because Sir Peter Hall had offered to cast him as Falstaff whenever he fancied doing it, and he realised he was feeling stressed just at the thought of driving to the West End every day. He had also had several health scares, including the discovery, after he lost his voice in the early 1970s, of a growth on

his vocal chords which needed to be surgically removed. "I remember that night sitting in the bath in the hospital and singing my favourite songs because I thought I may never sing them again," he later recalled, and again Eric Morecambe springs to mind, as someone else who could invest even his own poor health with warm humour.

Barker spent his retirement running an antiques shop in Chipping Norton until he realised that it was losing money hand over fist. Heaven knows how much unused comic material that venture must have provided him with. The shop was spiritually a long way removed from televi-

sion's corridors of power, yet he and Joy, his wife of nearly 60 years, and who was at his bedside when he died, never distanced themselves from their many showbiz friends.

Yesterday, Renwick described the Barkers' annual garden party as "a completely magical occasion. It really was the highlight of our summer, in such a glorious location, with people like David Jason and Barry Cryer and Ronnie Corbett there, and a trad jazz band playing in the adjoining paddock". Or ploughing in the adjoining paddock, as Barker might perhaps have preferred it.

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'Ronnie was pure gold in triplicate. We worked together since 1965 and we never had a cross word. It was 40 years of harmonious joy.'

I will miss him terribly'

RONNIE CORBETT
THE TWO RONNIES CO-STAR

'Working with Ronnie was without doubt some of the best years of my career. The world of entertainment has lost a huge talent'

DAVID JASON
OPEN ALL HOURS CO-STAR

'Ronnie Barker was such a warm, friendly and encouraging presence when I started in television. He was also a great comic actor to learn from'

JOHN CLEESE
WHO BEGAN HIS CAREER
ALONGSIDE BARKER ON
THE FROST REPORT

'We have lost a giant of comedy. Ronnie Barker will be numbered among a select band of comedy greats who shaped British comedy in the 20th century'

MARK THOMPSON
BBC DIRECTOR GENERAL



Obituaries

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When, in March, Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett were billed to reappear on the nation's television screens with *The Two Ronnies Sketchbook*, there was some derision among the professional critics. They had to eat their words when the first of the six episodes of this selection of old sketches drew eight million viewers – 35 per cent of the audience. Almost a quarter of these viewers had not even been born when *The Two Ronnies* was first broadcast, in 1971.

Ronnie Barker was, in the first place, a master of television sitcom. Drawing on his background of serious acting in the theatre, he convincingly portrayed characters ranging from the lecherous old Lord Rustless in *Hark at Barker and His Lordship Entertains* to the stammering shopkeeper Arkwright in *Open All Hours* and the wily jailbird Fletcher in the hugely popular *Porridge*. But at the same time, with Ronnie Corbett, he formed the rotund half of the double act whose show *The Two Ronnies* ran for 15 years, brought to an end only by Barker's decision to retire from show business. He also wrote much of the duo's material, showing a fondness for Spoonerisms and double entendres, which owed much to music hall: "Your game, milady," the butler would say. "Your nuts, milord."

Like many great performers, the on- and off-screen Barker were two different people. "I've always known I haven't a personality of my own," he once said. "I have to be someone else to be happy. That's why I became an actor, I suppose." This was reflected in his policy of declining personal appearances.

The straitlaced Barker was born in Bedford, in 1929, the son of an oil-company clerk. The family moved to Cowley, in Oxford, when he was four and, on leaving Oxford High School, he studied for six months to be an architect but realised his mathematics and physics were not good enough; he became a bank clerk instead. He caught the acting bug through his involvement with amateur dramatics and, after 18 months, decided to leave his bank job and turn professional. Barker worked in repertory theatre for seven years, making his professional debut as Lieutenant Spicer in J.M. Barrie's *Quality Street* (1948) at Aylesbury, and subsequently treading the boards in Manchester and Oxford.

The theatre director Peter Hall, working with the Oxford Playhouse company, took Barker with him when he moved to London and the actor made his debut there as both the Chantymen and Joe Silva in *Mourning Becomes Electra* (Apollo Theatre, 1955). He followed it with further West End roles as the Farmer in *Summertime* (Apollo, 1955), a Gypsy Man in *Listen to the Wind* (Arts, 1955), Mr Thwaites in *Double Image* (Savoy, 1956), various parts in *Camino Real* (Phoenix, 1957), Robertoles-Diams in *Irma La Douce* (Lyric, 1958), Bob Acres in *All in Love* (Mayfair, 1964), Lord Slingsby-Cradock in *Mr Whatnot* (Arts, 1964) and Birdboot in *The Real Inspector Hound* (Criterion, 1968).

Among his classical roles with the Royal Court Theatre during those years were Perigord in *Nekrasov* (1957), Nikolai Triletski in *Platonov* (1960) and Quince in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1962). He also played Alf Always in *Sweet Fanny Adams* at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East (1966).

Such a solid grounding in theatre gave Barker a springboard to other media – although Peter Hall, for one, might have wished he had stayed on the stage. ("He's the great actor we lost," Hall is quoted as saying. And, significantly, "The measure of his comedy was that he was absolutely true.") When he moved into radio, it was as Ronnie rather than Ronald – his director changed his name in the credits without his knowing. He played the Lord of the Manor, Lord Russett, in *Floggit's* (1956), the series that brought Elsie and Doris Waters's stage characters of Gert and Daisy to radio as owners of a village store.

He was also in radio's longest-running comedy show, *The Navy Lark* (1959-77), as the lookout AB Johnson, who would tell Jon Pertwee's Chief Petty Officer: "You're rotten, you are." Johnson's alter ego, Lieutenant-Commander Stanton, was acted by Barker, too. In 1963, the cast moved on to dry land to operate a commercial television station in a spin-off radio series, *The TV Lark*, and Fatso Johnson operated Camera One. On radio, Barker



'I have to be someone else to be happy': Barker as Fletcher in 'Porridge' (1974-77) BBC/PA

RONNIE BARKER

Comedy star of 'Porridge' and 'Open All Hours' and the larger of the Two Ronnies

also played Ronnie, trainee at a school for chefs, in *Crowther's Crowd* (1963), which starred Leslie Crowther and June Whitfield.

But it was on television that Barker achieved his greatest fame. Although he had taken serious character roles in series such as *A Tale of Two Cities* (as Jerry Cruncher, 1965), *The Saint* (1966) and *The Avengers* (1967), his forte for comedy soon had him typecast on the small screen. He played the gormless son Ron in the first television version of the popular radio sitcom *Take It From Here*, featuring the Glums family – an episode in the BBC television series *Six More Faces of Jim* (1962). Written by the original partnership of Frank Muir and Denis Norden, it starred Jimmy Edwards and June Whitfield repeating their radio roles of Mr Glum and Eth. Barker was also a regular in Edwards's Northern brass band sitcom *Bold as Brass* (1964) and in the Cold War comedy *Foreign Affairs* (1966) he played Grisha Petrovitch, the commissar's slightly pro-British assistant at the Russian embassy in London.

The actor's pairing with the diminutive, Edinburgh-born Ronnie Corbett in *The Frost Report* (1966-67) began a 21-year screen partnership that would bring him as much fame as the sitcoms he was still to make. The BBC programme was a satirical show starring David Frost, formerly of *That Was the Week That Was*, and the team who

went on to found *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. As two grammar-school boys among a largely Oxbridge crowd, Barker and Corbett gravitated towards one another and were soon performing sketches together. *Frost Over England* (1967) featured some of the best items from the series and won the coveted Golden Rose at the 1967 Montreux Television Festival. Barker and Corbett also appeared in *Frost on Sunday* (1968-70), after Frost switched to ITV, and Barker contributed scripts, submitted through his agent under the pseudonym Gerald Wiley because he wanted them to be accepted on their merit.

The BBC signed the duo to appear in their own series after its head of light entertainment, Bill Cotton, watched them and another of the Frost team, Josephine Tewson, providing entertainment at the 1971 Bafta Awards ceremony, at the London Palladium. They did a Henry VIII sketch, with Barker as Bluff King Hal, Tewson as all six wives and Corbett as Wolsey.

As a result, *The Two Ronnies* (1971-86) was born and became an immediate hit with viewers. More than 15 million regularly tuned in to watch a cocktail of comedy sketches, playlets, songs and parodies, a long-winded Corbett monologue and a singing star, sandwiched between the opening and closing news summaries. This "news" would include supposed previews of the show's sketch-

es, such as: "The Romford girl who took the Pill, washed down with pond water, and was today diagnosed as three months stagnant." Or: "A 50-year-old doctor who claims that smoking takes years off your life. He says that if he hadn't smoked when he was younger he'd now be 63."

A regular feature of the show was an investigation by the detectives Charley Farley and Piggy Malone, a lunatic's answer to Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson, and Barker usually performed a musical number in drag, until his wife eventually asked him to stop. Another regular character, Dr Spooner, transposed initial consonants and even middle syllables: "I dashed out and tumped into a jaxi." At the end, the pair would sign off: "It's good night from me – and it's good night from him."

There were two filmed television spin-offs: *The Pinnie* (1975), which won the Golden Rose at the Montreux Television Festival, and its sequel, *By the Sea* (1982). The pair also travelled down under to make *The Two Ronnies in Australia* (1987).

For most of *The Two Ronnies* run, which totalled 12 series and 94 episodes, Barker wrote 75 per cent of the material, under the pseudonym Gerald Wiley. The quality of this helped to ensure a consistently high standard and viewers continued to tune in to the Barker-Corbett double act. "It's a marriage," said Barker.

People refuse to believe that we don't have rows, tensions, private wars. It's a strange thing after so many years but we never have. Actually, it's even more amicable than a marriage – wedlock without the bad patches. Our sense of humour and perception of what's good and what's rubbish are uncommonly in tune.

One of the writers of the other 25 per cent was Barry Cryer, who had also written for Eric Morecambe and Ernie Wise. "It wasn't like writing for Eric and Ernie," recalled Cryer. Morecambe and Wise played, on the whole, themselves. Barker and Corbett, when not behind their "news desk", were playing other characters:

You could write almost anything knowing these two would do it brilliantly. Because they weren't a double act; they were two men who worked together and had their own careers.

Cryer saw Barker as "an actor who was brilliant at comedy", Corbett as "the comic who was a pretty good actor".

Throughout the years of *The Two Ronnies*, Barker also enjoyed success as the star of half a dozen BBC sitcoms. He had already had three ITV series. *The Ronnie Barker Playhouse* (1968) of half-hour single comedy plays included Alun Owen's *Ah, There You Are*, introducing the character of the decrepit Lord Rustless. The ageing earl, who often walked round his estate wearing pyjamas and a smoking jacket, was later featured in *Hark at Barker* (1969-70), written by Barker himself under the pseudonym Jonathan Cobbald. He made a further series of comedies each of a different theme in *Six Dates with Barker* (1971), which he wrote as Gerald Wiley.

At the BBC, Barker revived Lord Rustless in *His Lordship Entertains* (1972), with the stately Chrome Hall transformed into a hotel. *Seven of One* (1973) provided him with another chance to portray a range of characters in different comedy plays and included Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais's *Prisoner and Escort*. The following year, this was turned into the series *Porridge* (1974-77), with Barker starring as the old lag Norman Stanley Fletcher, consigned to Slade Prison, in Cumbria, on a five-year sentence for robbery. The workshy prisoner cynically exploited the system with great cunning and was usually one step ahead of the "screws".

The character of Fletcher was one of Barker's great comedy creations, attracting audiences of more than 15 million, and *Porridge* continued to be repeated long after its three-year run. Barker was ably supported by his co-stars Richard Beckinsale (as Fletcher's cellmate, Lennie Godber), Fulton Mackay (as the ferocious Chief Officer Mackay) and Brian Wilde (as the milder Warden Barrowclough). A sequel, the six-part *Going Straight* (1978), featured Fletcher and Godber trying to adjust to life after being released from Slade Prison.

By then, Barker's Northern shopkeeper, the rude, penny-pinching Arkwright, notable for his stammer, had already been born in *Open All Hours* (1976, 1981-85). The sitcom began with one series on BBC2 and, after finding a mass audience through repeats on BBC1, switched channels five years later and achieved ratings almost as high as those for *Porridge*. Arkwright bullied Granville (David Jason), his nephew and overworked as-

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sistant, and lusted after the buxom Nurse Gladys Emmanuel (Lynda Baron), who lived across the road in the Yorkshire street where the writer Roy Clarke's comedy was set.

In between series, Barker made *The Magnificent Evans* (1984), another Clarke sitcom of bullying and lust. He played Plantagenet Evans, a Welsh photographer who has a lens for the ladies and puts upon those with whom he works, notably Willie (Dickie Arnold) and his fiancée and assistant Rachel (Sharon Morgan).

Barker's last sitcom, which he wrote himself under the pseudonym Bob Ferris, was *Clarence* (1988). He played a short-sighted, inept removal man, Clarence Sale, who underwent a trial marriage with a ladies' maid, Jane Travers (Josephine Tewson), and was frustrated by a bolster down the centre of their bed. *Clarence* was screened at the same time as Barker's surprise announcement, in 1988, that he was retiring at the age of 58. "I had run dry," he said later:

I had completely run out of ideas and it scared and panicked me. I was always able to write scripts but, you know, I couldn't think of a single thing to write about. It was a very weird sensation. I had seen friends of mine start burning out. No one wants to see a 70-year-old on television who can't remember his lines. And also I had lost interest.

This came shortly after Barker had turned down Peter Hall's offer of the role of Falstaff in *Henry IV, Part I* and *Part II* at the National Theatre. "My first reaction was that I'd hate the traffic every night," he said. "I knew then that I shouldn't be in the business." On television, Barker had taken occasional opportunities to draw on his theatre background, acting Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1971) and Henry Ormonroyd in *When We Are Married* (1975), but he was in demand as a comedy actor.

He was never given a star vehicle in the cinema, apart from the 1979 film spin-off of *Porridge*. After making his big-screen debut in the short *The Silent Witness* (1963), he was a supporting actor in pictures of the 1960s and 1970s such as *Doctor in Distress* (1963), *Father Came Too* (1963), *The Bargee* (1964), *A Home of Your Own* (1965) and *The Magnificent Seven Deadly Sins* (1971). He also played Friar Tuck in Richard Lester's *Robin and Marian* (1976) and starred as General Futtock, a character not a million miles from Lord Rustless, in *Futtocks End* (1969), a silent comedy that he wrote himself.

In retirement, Barker indulged his passion for Victoriana, collecting postcards, illustrated books and prints and running an antiques shop in Oxfordshire, at Chipping Norton. He returned to television just occasionally, in 2002 as the butler to Albert Finney's Winston Churchill in Richard Loncraine's film *The Gathering Storm*, and in 2003 as the General opposite (his old friend from Oxford childhood days) Maggie Smith's Mrs Emily DeLahanty in the same director's adaptation of William Trevor's *My House in Umbria*. A play, *Mum*, he wrote for his actress daughter Charlotte, was performed at the King's Head, Islington, in 1998, but was so badly panned he was put off writing altogether.

He was reunited with Ronnie Corbett for *Two Ronnies Night* (1999), *A Tribute to the Two Ronnies* (2000) and, this year, *The Two Ronnies Sketchbook*. The two, Barker rather a shadow of his younger and larger self, were filmed in front of a studio audience sitting behind the familiar desk to introduce some of their classic sketches – the *Mastermind* sketch in which Corbett's specialist subject is answering the penultimate question, the "Four Candles" sketch in which Barker tries to buy fork-handles from an ironmonger's...

During his career, Ronnie Barker won Bafta awards as Best Light Entertainment Performer in 1971, 1975 and 1977, and last year he was honoured with a Bafta lifetime achievement award for his contribution to comedy. Among his published books were *It's Goodnight from Him* (1976), the autobiography *Dancing in the Moonlight: early years on the stage* (1993) and *All I Ever Wrote (That Still Exists)* (1999), and collections of vintage postcards from his own collection: *Ronnie Barker's Book of Bathing Beauties* (1974), *Ronnie Barker's Book of Boudoir Beauties* (1975) and *Sauce* (1977).

Anthony Hayward

Ronald William George Barker, actor, comedian and writer: born Bedford 25 September 1929; OBE 1978; married 1957 Joy Tubb (two sons, one daughter); died Adderbury, Oxfordshire 3 October 2005.

VOICE OF THE DAILY Mirror

voice@mirror.co.uk

Funtastic Ron

HE was a giant of British comedy.

As Fletcher, Arkwright or plain old Ronnie, he wasn't only a brilliant comedian – he was a brilliant actor, too.

Imagine a comedy show these days getting 18 million viewers on a Saturday night.

Yet that's just what he achieved with *The Two Ronnies*, earning him a place in the fabric of British life.

It seems incredible that it is 18 years since Ronnie Barker announced his retirement. For he was so widely loved, it felt like he'd never left.

His memory and the fun he brought will stay in our hearts for a very long time.



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Editorial & Opinion

THE THIRD LEADER CHARLES NEVIN

Goodbye from him

And so it's goodbye from the other him, the bigger, wider him, the him who was an actor as much as a comic, who wrote the gags, who started off in a bank and looked like it. Ronald William George Barker, aka Norman Stanley Fletcher and that stuttering shopkeeper, the him who retired to run an antique shop and looked like it.

It's been fashionable to find Barker a safe, comfortable kind of performer, and so think the less of him. And that is exactly what he was, but someone had to do it, hold the line, present the acceptable face of mainstream comedy while the Milligans and Pythons disappeared off up their own surrealities, the Mannings and Davidsons peddled their rarely amusing prejudices, and Morecambe and Wise continued

to be just a little bit too northern (for some).

And so Barker carried on from the great days of Fifties wireless in taking the wordplay and the innuendo of the music hall and improving and polishing them, giving them a touch of (middle) class. And while we waited for *The Fast Show*, Steve Coogan, *Little Britain* and Peter Kay to take their inspiration and apply some edge, there was a lot to laugh at in the craft,

care and, above all, timing of Barker, standing up or sitting down.

His great peer, Barry Cryer, said yesterday, "He was like a chameleon – you couldn't believe it was the same man if you watched *Porridge* or *Open All Hours*." Which reminded me of this, from *The Two Ronnies*: "We had hoped to be bringing you Arthur the Human Chameleon now, but he crawled across a tartan rug this afternoon and died of exhaustion." That's class, too.

The late Ronnie Barker told his biographer **Bob McCabe** of the accidental meeting with a barman that started one of the great comic partnerships – not forgetting a little help from John Cleese

When Ronnie met Ronnie

BBC TV

4 Ronnie Barker could just play anyone or anything; Ronnie Corbett had a narrower range but his timing was extraordinary

that good. And we weren't getting enough stuff. I remember going to David at the end of one show and it hadn't gone well, but David was always so optimistic. He said, 'What a wonderful show that was'. I said, 'No, it was bloody dreadful. David. It was terrible, the scripts were awful'.

'I decided that I would write something. I had a couple of ideas and I decided I would write them and send them in under an assumed name. I spoke to my agent who said, 'You'll have to send them through me, I'll have to pretend I'm this man's agent as well'.

'So I picked this name Gerald Wiley, because most people who have a pseudonym have a glamorous name like Rock Armstrong or something wonderful. So I picked a really ugly name that no one would dream of choosing as their pseudonym. Then I said, 'Supposing they want to see me? And my agent said, 'I'll tell them you're a bit of a recluse'.

'So in came the scripts and the producer said, 'I've got two new scripts in from another writer, must be something to do with David. A man named Wiley'. Ronnie C said, 'Well, they're not bad, I think we ought to try them'. I was very pleased secretly. For the next three weeks we did sketches by Gerald Wiley, as well as other sketches.

Barker went to ridiculous lengths to keep Wiley's identity a secret from the rest of the Frost crew, at one point instructing his agent to appease Frank Muir's desire to know more by setting up a meeting, then later calling back to cancel it.

Ronnie C, too, was eager to know more about Wiley and was keen to buy the rights to some of his sketches so that he could use them in his act. '[My] agent said, 'I've had a letter from Ronnie Corbett asking if he can buy the sketch'. I said, 'Charge him £250 for it'. So Ronnie came in and said, 'He wants £250 for it'. I told him, 'That's rubbish. Don't pay it. It's not worth that'.

'Anyway, it was Christmas time and I said to my agent, 'Send it to Ronnie Corbett and say Mr Wiley would be very grateful if you

So much in comedy is fate. What if Eric's mum hadn't spotted a teenage Ernie? What if solicitor Bob Mortimer hadn't been drunk enough to heckle Vic Reeves that night in a pub in south London? And what if Ronnie Barker, West End actor and semi-known television face, hadn't popped in one night for a drink at the Buxton, an actors' drinking club just off London's Shaftesbury Avenue?

He might never have met the bartender, a between-jobs Scottish performer who shared Barker's forename. Ronnie Corbett hailed from Edinburgh. As he served Ronnie a drink, they spent a few moments talking about this and that, actors shooting the breeze. In a few short years these two casual acquaintances would become one of the nation's best-loved double acts.

When Ronnie Barker died last week, there were many tributes to his genius as a comic actor. But it was as one half of The Two Ronnies that he really came to prominence and it all started that night.

'It was a theatrical club,' Barker recalled. 'You could have lunch and dinner there and the bar could be said to be open till about 3.30am. It should have closed at 11pm but it was one of those sort of places that I think the police didn't bother with. It wasn't sleazy, it was just an actors' drinking club and the actors simply carried on drinking halfway through the night.'

'I used to go in and there he was behind the bar. He had a part-time job there. That's where I met him first. Then, he was just the man who was serving. I knew who he was, I knew he was an actor, but we didn't become chums then. We first became chums when we met again three years later on the Frost show.'

David Frost had ushered in humour with a sharper edge that made audiences sit up and pay attention. While his Cambridge contemporary Peter Cook was shepherding the British 'satire boom' via his London nightclub, The Establishment, Frost was rack-



...accept this sketch with compliments, free of charge. Because you've done such marvellous work with his sketches and made them look so funny on screen! Ronnie came to me, 'He's given it to me, he's given me the sketch'. I said, 'Oh, that's nice of him'. A short while later, half a dozen crystal goblets arrived from Ronnie Corbett, all inscribed with the initials GW "for giving me that sketch".

After a while the Frost crew began to doubt the existence of Wiley, convinced that he must be another writer. Corbett recalled: "Somebody ran a book to try to guess who he was. The most illustrious names were in there — Tom Stoppard, Noël Coward was still alive so his name was down there, Ratigan, Willis Hall, Keith Waterhouse, Frank Muir."

"Given that it came through his agent, Ronnie B used to visualise this character as being possibly a novelist or short story writer or playwright, possibly gay; that was the rumour he put out. And we all fed on it. On a Sunday afternoon before the show Ronnie did come in to my dressing room and say to me, 'I have to tell you. I'm Gerald Wiley'."

Wiley's identity could remain a secret no longer. Barker had decided, "I wrote a letter — I had Wiley's name printed and everything — saying that Gerald Wiley would like to entertain the cast of Frost on Sunday at the Chinese restaurant opposite the studio. All the writers turned up as well because there were bets going on as to who he was. It said that Gerald Wiley would be there to meet you."

"Then the time came and Frank Muir was late. I was there already and Frank Muir came in and they all applauded him as he entered, and he said, 'It's not me, it's not me'. When everyone was there I got up and said, 'Can I just say something before we start? It's me. I'm Gerald Wiley'."

Barker was pleased by the success of his subterfuge but in many ways regretted being revealed, even if he was the instigator of that revelation. "Frost was the only one who had guessed it. It was out then. From that moment I wished it hadn't been out because with The Two Ronnies I was writing stuff and they were saying, 'Oh that's very good', so I was back in the situation I didn't want to be in. If it [the mystery of Wiley's identity] had continued all my life it would've been better."

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From Ronnie Barker: *The Authorised Biography* by Bob McCabe, BBC Books, £7.99. Copies can be ordered for £7.59 with free delivery from The Sunday Times BookFirst on 0870 165 8585



The two Ronnies with Cleese in one of their most famous sketches for The Frost Report — which reflected their real-life social positions

helpful, couldn't have been nicer. "I think I learnt a little bit, particularly from Ronnie Corbett, which might surprise people because Barker is a great actor but Corbett had moments of timing that were absolutely extraordinary. Ronnie Barker could just play anyone or anything: Ronnie Corbett had a narrower range but his timing was extraordinary."

The Frost Report, which ran for two seasons, produced numerous classic sketches, perhaps the most famous of which remains John Plank across between Ronnie Corbett's head and John Cleese's head and my head would touch it as well. We were absolutely in a

Law's biting take on class. Physicalised by the distinct difference in height of the three central performers, the tall Cleese played upper class, the medium Barker personified middle class and the diminutive Corbett was the flat-capped working class.

"Someone obviously saw that our heights were very funny," said Barker. "You could put a plank across between Ronnie Corbett's head and John Cleese's head and my head would touch it as well. We were absolutely in a

straight line. So they thought upper class, middle class, lower class and that's where the whole 'I look up to him', 'I look down on him' came from."

The show morphed into Frost on Sunday. Despite boasting one of the most impressive writing teams in television, Barker felt that the material was not always as strong as it could be. And thus was a man named Gerald Wiley born.

"When you're doing 26 weeks you start to find bits that aren't

PETER KAY, BARKER'S KINDRED SPIRIT FROM A MODERN COMIC AGE

Of the newest crop of comedy talent, Ronnie admired a young man from Bolton called Peter Kay.

Kay had had a number of dead-end jobs before deciding to have a stab at stand-up comedy. He discovered he had a talent for it and was soon in great demand. Before he knew it he was appearing on television, winning Channel 4's So You Think You're Funny talent competition in 1997 and going on to sell-out tours,

his own TV show. That Peter Kay Thing in 1999 and the following year the first series of a show called Phoenix Nights.

Set in a northern club, the fictitious Phoenix in Bolton, the

sitcom was highly praised. What Ronnie didn't know was that Kay was also an admirer of his: Ronnie was his hero, and had been since childhood.

When Kay made contact and told him as much, Ronnie was delighted.

"I think he's very, very funny. He's sort of whimsical, that's what I call it, he has a whimsical turn of phrase," he told me.

"And also you have to admit that if someone likes you very, very much, you tend to like them a bit. He wrote me a long fan letter and I didn't realise who it was from. Peter Kay didn't mean anything to me because it's a very ordinary sounding name."

"And then it said, 'I've just finished a tour, six months all round the place and I'm exhausted', and I thought, 'Just a minute, Peter Kay,

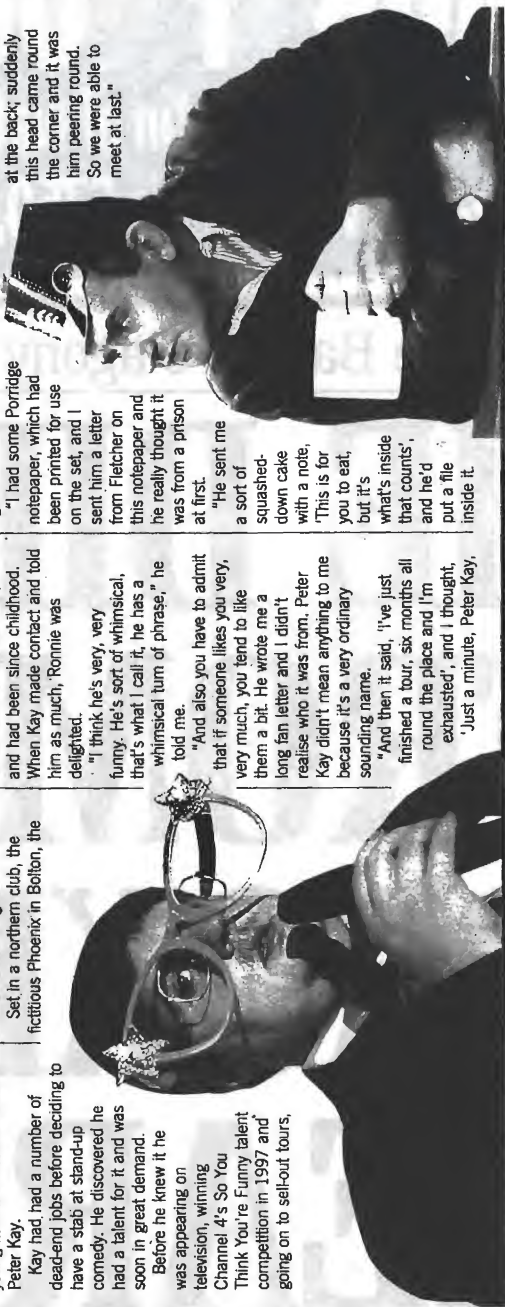
this is the guy from Phoenix Nights'. So I wrote back to him and he was delighted and wrote again."

"I had some Porridge newspaper, which had been printed for use on the set, and I sent him a letter from Fletcher on this newspaper and he really thought it was from a prison at first."

"He sent me a sort of squashed-down cake with a note, 'This is for you to eat, but it's what's inside that counts', and he'd put a file inside it."

Not a big file, just an emery board.

"At the Baffa tribute he came round to where I was sitting at the back, suddenly this head came round the corner and it was him peering round. So we were able to meet at last."



"giving it wholesale and serving it up into the mainstream courtesy of television. As the week man of both That Was the Week That Was (TW3) in 1962-63 and Not So Much a Programme, More a Way of Life in 1964, he had established himself as a unique force in British television, equally comfortable cracking gags or interviewing leading politicians."

In March 1966 he launched his new series, The Frost Report, designed as an irreverent look at one particular topic each week. It featured a number of sketches for which Frost assembled a team of three — John Cleese, Ronnie Corbett and Ronnie Barker. "Ronnie Corbett and John Cleese were suggested by David Frost," Barker said.

"David had seen Ronnie when he was working with Danny LaRue at Danny LaRue's club. And then the producer Jimmy Gilbert put me in, and that's when Ronnie and I teamed up because we were all a bit university boys. Everyone goes to university now, but [then], university was considered a cut above."

"So they were a bit grand, especially John Cleese who was very grand. He looked down on Ronnie, and Ronnie was right down there. John was nice, but nevertheless we felt that he and David were 'them', and we were 'us'. There was no enmity or no real distance, but if you had to group together in twos, naturally Ronnie and I would go together as John and David did."

Corbett also vividly remembered the early days of the Frost Report. "He [Barker] was doing quite a lot of radio shows like The Navy Lark at that time. I don't think we thought about it in any momentous way but we knew each other a bit because I had worked with his wife Joy in a pantomime in Bromley where she was the stage manager."

A lack of a university background was not the only thing that the two Ronnies had in common. "That linked us, it's true," said Corbett. "Also the fact that we were much more experienced theatrical performers than both of them, Ronnie in particular. We'd knocked about a bit."

"John used to get very, very nervous at doing live television, but Ronnie and I didn't. I think it's also funny that both Ronnie and I were brought up and raised in big university towns, Oxford and Edinburgh, with the university glowering over both of us, although we didn't attend it. There was a common thing between us, I'd say."

"University then was very different," agreed Barker. "There was a university and there was a town and they didn't seem to mix much,



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SEE PAGES 20-21



Ronnie Barker's agony over son who became a fugitive

HE DIED FROM A BROKEN HEART

RONNIE BARKER died heart-broken at his fugitive son's arrest in a child pornography investigation, it was revealed last night.

Adam Barker, 37, skipped bail and vanished more than a year ago and will not be able to attend his father's funeral through fear of being arrested again.

The case was a hammer blow to his father, the much-loved comedy actor whose hilarious sketches and sitcoms entertained millions over four decades.

Last night tributes were pouring in for 76-year-old Barker, famous for his enduring

By **Nick Craven, Stephen Wright** and **Beth Hale**

partnership with Ronnie Corbett in *The Two Ronnies* and his roles as old lag Norman Stanley Fletcher in *Porridge* and stammering shopkeeper Arkwright in *Open All Hours*.

He was also a celebrated comedy writer, contributing many of the *Two Ronnies*' most popular sketches under the name Gerald Wiley, notably the famous 'four candles' routine.

But there will be added sadness for his family at his funeral with the absence of Adam. Last night Barker's elder son Larry said the

Turn to Page 2, Col. 3



Ronnie Barker earlier this year in one of the last pictures taken of him



Ronnie Barker with wife Joy and son Adam who is on the run after being arrested in a child pornography probe

Continued from Page One

family held out little hope that his errant brother might return.

'Obviously Adam won't be there,' he said at his home near Bordeaux in France. 'There's no possibility of Adam being there.'

Barker's agent Rosalind Chatto said his wife Joy Tubb, whom he married in 1957, was with him when he died.

He had been nursed at home but is thought to have gone into a hospice in the last 24 hours.

Miss Chatto said: 'He died yesterday after a long period of heart trouble. He died peacefully and his wife was with him.'

Larry Barker said: 'You only have to hear all the plaudits about my father to realise how popular he was.'

'It's a very emotional time and we're all very moved by what people have to say. He was a one-off - a truly won-

derful person. He was much loved, and will be missed by everybody. I saw him very recently. This is a terrible time for us.'

Adam Barker, an actor from Ealing, West London, was arrested more than a year ago as part of the huge Operation Ore child pornography investigation.

Detectives found more than 1,200 graphic images of children on the hard drive of his computer, some of them extremely disturbing.

They were first alerted because his credit card had apparently been used to log on to a U.S. child porn website, along with more than 7,000 other Britons.

A warrant was issued when he failed to answer bail in June 2004 and it is believed he went into hiding in France, where both his father and elder brother have properties.

The unresolved allegations against his son gnawed at Barker's deteriorating

health, according to veteran actor Leslie Phillips, a long-standing friend and colleague.

'I know Ronnie suffered because of Adam's situation,' said Mr Phillips, 81.

'Ronnie would have been there for Adam if he'd let him. I know that he was acutely worried over the outcome of the case if it went to court.'

'I doubt it if Adam ever contacted him since going missing, but Ronnie would have helped him whatever the crisis.'

'He was very close to all his children in the way a good parent should be. He was always there for them and enjoyed a good relationship with all of them.'

'Ronnie didn't talk openly about Adam's plight but I know he was deeply concerned for his welfare and troubled that he had gone missing.'

Another friend of the family living near Barker's 17th cen-

tury mill house in the hamlet of Dean, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire, said: 'He was devastated by the disappearance of Adam.'

'It shattered him physically and emotionally and I think that, quite understandably, contributed to his demise.'

'Apparently there was absolutely no contact at all with his son, which must have been very painful. That was the word from those closest to him.'

Last night a senior member of Scotland Yard's Paedophile Squad said: 'Adam's name is still being circulated and he needs to talk to us.'

He said the case would be overseen at the highest level but stressed the matter would be handled with the greatest sensitivity in view of Adam's father's death.

If convicted of an offence, Adam would be likely to face between a year and 18 months' prison, according to a police source.

n.craven@dailymail.co.uk

He was an absolute gem, says the other Ronnie

By Richard Simpson

RONNIE CORBETT - who worked with Barker for four decades and enjoyed huge success with him on *The Two Ronnies* - led the tributes to his comedy partner last night.

He told the BBC's *Six O'Clock News*: 'Ronnie was the very best. He was five star, crème de la crème, as a performer, as a writer and as a person. An absolute gem. He was an encyclopaedia of comedy.'

'He has made a major contribution throughout his years to the finest quality British comedy.'

'Look at *Open All Hours* and *Porridge* - still immensely watchable shows. His lifetime's work is a huge legacy and he will be sorely missed.'

DAVID JASON, who played Barker's co-star Granville in *Open All Hours*, said: 'Working with Ronnie was always a joy and those were without doubt some of the best years of my career. The world of entertainment has lost a huge talent.'

JOHN CLEESE, who began his comedy career with Barker in the 1960s series *The Frost Report*, said: 'Ronnie was such a warm, friendly and encouraging presence to have when I started in television. He was also a great comic actor to learn from.'

Cleese's Monty Python colleague **MICHAEL PALIN** added: 'I can't think of anyone who knew how to play comedy better than Ronnie Barker.'

'Ronnie was a straightforward, down-to-earth man who had this extraordinary ability to make the nation laugh, probably more often than anyone else I know.'

SIR DAVID FROST, who hosted *The*

And then there was one

PAGES 10-11

Frost Report said: 'Ronnie was a genius comedian and a genius actor as well - that is something that is often overlooked.'

'When John Cleese, Ronnie Corbett and Ronnie Barker first debuted on the show, we all knew straight away that we were very lucky to have them.'

Former Tory prime minister **SIR JOHN MAJOR**, who was in power in the early 90s when Barker was still a regular on our screens, said: 'He will forever be remembered as one of the great comic actors.'

'We are fortunate that his genius was captured on film and can therefore be enjoyed by generations to come.'

'The many characters he crafted and the sheer delight he gave us will live on for evermore.'

BRUCE FORSYTH said: 'You can't call Ronnie Barker a comedian, he was an actor, and a great writer. That made him so very, very special, which is why you can't replace anyone like Ronnie Barker.'

'He never traded in smut. Today you can get very vulgar and crude lines. In his lines there was always a double meaning, but he was never ever crude at any time in his career.'

MICHAEL PARKINSON described Barker as 'very shy, a man uneasy with the fame that came with the job, a man who liked to observe in the shade.'

'You were never quite aware of him in a social occasion, he didn't like them but, my word, when he stood centre stage you better watch him,' he added.

Broadcaster **BARRY CRYER** said Barker was 'like a chameleon'. 'You couldn't believe it was the same man if you watched *Porridge* or *Open All Hours*. He was an amazing character actor.'

Magician **PAUL DANIELS** added: 'He was at the top of his profession for such a long time in a hugely competitive business. He inspired many top comedians and his legacy will live forever.'

Fellow actor **DAVID SUCHET** said: 'Ronnie Barker was truly gifted and he has left behind a library of work which will entertain this nation for many years to come.'

Comedian **PETER KAY** said Barker's death 'leaves a huge hole in our lives when somebody like Ronnie passes, just like Eric Morecambe you feel like you've lost a dear friend.'

MICHAEL HURLL, producer of *The Two Ronnies*, said: 'Ronnie meant to comedy in this country laughs, big laughs and laughs that you will always remember.'

BBC chairman **MICHAEL GRADE** said: 'We have lost a national treasure. He was a comic actor of real genius and a naturally funny comedian in the vaudeville tradition - a unique combination.'

The corporation's director-general **MARK THOMPSON** added: 'We have lost a giant of comedy.'

'For millions of viewers across several generations his name alone was enough to guarantee their presence in front of the television screen.'



AND THEN TH

He made his name as half of Britain's best loved comedy duo. But in a life dedicated to laughter, Ronnie Barker was finally broken by family trauma



Top: The young Ronald with sisters Eileen and Vera. Middle: Ronnie with his children Larry, Charlotte, Adam and wife Joy. Above: In that famous TV sketch about class with John Cleese and Ronnie Corbett



by
**Richard
Pendlebury**

LAST night burglars broke into a police station and stole the toilets. Police say they have nothing to go on. Ronnie Barker's deadpan newsreader pauses and cocks his head.

A glint from behind those trademark thick-lensed glasses is the only acknowledgement of the gales of audience laughter which greet this instant classic, a joke that will be repeated in every school playground and workplace the following Monday morning.

Many great funnymen aspire to play tragedy in order to bare their souls. Ronnie Barker had little desire to prove or reveal anything about himself to anybody, other than an unparalleled ability to make the British public laugh.

For two decades he succeeded better than any other television comedy actor. Certainly, as his obituaries will agree today, he was the most loved.

And then, at the height of his fame but tired of the limelight and the demands of his own exacting standards, he simply walked away into early retirement and wilful obscurity, behind the counter of a little antiques shop in the Cotswolds where he could be 'himself'.

By then, of course, his comic legend was secure. Here was a performer for whom the word 'safe' was not a criticism but an acknowledgement that his appeal stretched from pensioners to the latest wave of British comedians whose own bleak and profane material Barker, a conservative by nature, often abhorred.

His own humour, best showcased in The Two Ronnies, was no more risqué than the stolen police lavatory gag, or the classic public service broadcast by his hapless linguist, who lectures against the dangers of 'pisproununciation'.

His timing was immaculate and his understanding of and interest in subverting the English language unquenchable.

But he was not so much a comic as a character actor and his two great creations were Arkwright, the miserly, sexually-frustrated Yorkshire corner shop owner of Open All Hours, and the world-weary old lag Norman Stanley Fletcher in the prison sitcom Porridge.

Most people of a certain age will be familiar with their ticks and foibles. Barker made them human and lovable for all their obvious faults; they were underdogs battling against an unsympathetic world which they couldn't change.

But what kind of man was Ronnie Barker? Away from the brilliant characterisation and dialogue (much of which was written by him-

self under a *nom de plume*), it was often hard to tell.

It has been said of Barker that in private life he never quite discarded the orderly vestiges of his first two pursuits, which were not in show-business but architecture and banking.

Ronald William George Barker was born in Bedford in 1929 and, aged four, moved with his family to Oxford, where he grew up.

After leaving school he became an architecture student, quitting after only six months because he realised that he simply 'wasn't good enough'.

Simultaneously, his older sister Vera decided she wanted to be a nurse. Her job at the Cowley Road branch of the Westminster Bank became available and young Ronald, as he was then known, stepped into her shoes.

For a very dull 18 months he worked as a junior clerk, no doubt taking careful note of the pettiness and pomposities of a life he was to satirise so successfully on television 30 years later.

But there was another world into which he could escape. Barker's father Leonard would take his son to local theatres; the first play he

character actor. His first comic role was as a chauffeur in the company's production of *Miranda* and he knew then that comedy, rather than tragedy, was to be his forte.

Nevertheless, by the mid Fifties he was appearing in West End productions as diverse (and serious) as *Mourning Becomes Electra*, *Irma La Douce* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*. At the same time he was developing his comic skills in minor character roles in a number of BBC radio comedy shows, including *The Floggits*, with Anthony Newley and Joan Sims.

The programme's director decided that Ronald Barker was too stuffy a name and changed it to Ronnie. Barker found this out only when he read the cast list in the *Radio Times*. It was a bittersweet experience: he was later fired because the show's stars felt he was getting too many laughs.

A part in the smash hit radio series *The Navy Lark* cemented his new, audience-friendly name. By the mid Sixties Barker was a regular on both stage and screen, albeit not yet a star.

That came in 1968, when he received a call from David Frost, who wanted him as a performer (and later a writer) on his new TV show *The Frost Report*.

This was to be a pivotal break, as also hired by Frost — along with most of the future Monty Python team — was another comic actor called Ronnie Corbett. The Two Ronnies had met at last.

But they were not to work together as a double act until 1971. It is said that the BBC was alerted to their chemistry when they presented the *Baftas* together and had to ad lib at length during a technical hitch.

During the next 16 years there were 12 series and a total of 98 shows. Aside from Morecambe and Wise, who were a different kind of double act, the Two Ronnies were the most popular duo on TV.

The format was laid down pretty quickly and honed by Barker, who was a perfectionist (it is said that he became impatient if the audience laughed too soon or too long at a joke) though not a tyrant.

This was his baby: the mysterious and prolific Gerald Wiley who wrote the majority of the shows was Barker himself, a fact he revealed only much later, so that his material would be judged on its merit rather than his name.

The show produced such classics as the Mastermind sketch in which 'Pass' was the correct answer to each question, and the hardware store sketch in which an exasperated Barker tries to buy fork handles from shopkeeper Corbett, who produces four candles instead.

Barker's strength was his

characterisation, and he particularly enjoyed playing buffoonish old boys such as Lord Rustless and General Futtlock. Certainly, whether in a character sketch or telling a shaggy dog story, the exuberant Corbett was more palpably himself. Barker, the more gifted actor and more private man, shone brilliantly in a number of personas, none of

which persuaded one that, yes, this was the man himself.

'What Ron found difficult was, he's never known who he is when he's playing himself,' Corbett recently observed.

Even if he had devoted the rest of his career to his partnership with Corbett then Barker would have been among the most famous and

An unparalleled ability to make the public laugh

can remember seeing was *Cottage To Let*, starring the master comic actor Alastair Sim and a very youthful George Cole. Barker was hooked and soon after joined a local amateur theatrical company.

His break came aged 19 when, after seeing the Manchester Repertory Company in nearby Aylesbury, he wrote to them asking for work. Barker had included a photograph of himself and when he received no reply he wrote again — asking for the picture back.

This cheek got him an audition, in which he was so impressive that the director hired him on the spot as an assistant stage director.

Barker's roots in repertory theatre, with its necessary discipline and rich variety of styles, provided the foundations of his excellence as a

■ Post your tributes to
Ronnie Barker at...
www.dailymail.co.uk

ERE WAS ONE



And finally... just a few of Ronnie's famous one-liners

'THE search for the man who terrorises nudist camps with a bacon slicer goes on. Inspector Lemuel Jones had a tip off this morning, but hopes to be back on duty tomorrow.'

he can no longer make ends meet.'

'TONIGHT, we'll be asking: Should all married couples be frank and earnest, or should one of them be a woman?'

'MANY old music hall fans were present at the funeral today of Fred "Chuckles" Jenkins, Britain's oldest and unfunniest comedian. In tribute, the vicar read out one of Fred's jokes, and the congregation had two minutes' silence.'

'AND now a sketch featuring Ronnie Corbett, whose wife thinks he's the salt of the earth. That's why she keeps him in the cellar.'

'THE man who invented the zip fastener was today honoured with a life peerage. He will now be known as the Lord of the Flies.'

'IN A packed programme tonight, we will be talking to an out-of-work contortionist who says

I retired was that the material was getting less good. I'd run out of ideas,' he explained. 'I was dry of sketches. Plus, I'd done everything I wanted to do. The situation sort of pushed me, goaded me into asking: "Well, haven't you done enough?" And I had.'

So he bought a shop in Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire. A master at capturing the eccentricity of others, this was Barker at perhaps his most eccentric. He became something akin to the Arkwright of the Cotswolds. One big difference between the actor and his creation was that Barker had a close-knit and loving family.

He met his wife Joy when she was working at a London theatre and they married in 1957. They had three children, Larry (named after Barker's idol Olivier), a successful advertising executive who has done well enough to retire in middle age to a French vineyard, Charlotte, 43, and Adam, 38, both struggling actors who, unavoidably perhaps, lived in their father's shadow.

His home life was said to be blissful, if carefully regimented by Barker, who had a collection of more than 70,000 Edwardian and Victorian postcards of which he once said: 'Most of my characters could live in a postcard world, where nothing really goes wrong, where innocence endures.'

After that he rarely reappeared in the spotlight. There were exceptions, such as an appearance at the Royal Variety Show in 1997 which saw him receive a long ovation.

The following year when, typically, he became worried that his daughter had been 'resting' for too long, he wrote a play for her called Mum, knowing that his name alone would get it produced and, most importantly, reviewed by the national media.

There were a few uncomfortable and idiosyncratic press audiences which Barker held to promote the show. In one, he told an interviewer of his retreat from fame: 'I refuse to be one of the still-with-us brigade. I try to be pleasant. But I reserve the right to avoid being caught.'

Sadly, he was caught by the

critical savaging that the play received and the next year, aged 70, he pretty much retired from the public gaze altogether, when he closed his antiques shop and sold off the contents. The public would not let go, however.

A best of The Two Ronnies series was commissioned and, perhaps in the knowledge that the physical legend was fading fast, Bafta organised a special show dedicated to his career achievements.

He was touched, but typically discomforted by the fuss. And there was desperate trouble on the horizon.

It is sad, in the final year of a life so brilliantly dedicated to laughter, that worry, pain and finally grief sought him out, uninvited.

There is no doubt that Barker's ailing heart was all but broken last year when his son Adam was arrested as part of a massive police dragnet of alleged internet

He became his own Arkwright of the Cotswolds

paedophiles, and then went on the run.

The comedian's haggard appearance on a recent series of shows reprising his career triumphs had as much to do with his son's predicament as failing health, according to friends. It shocked a legion of fans.

It's doubtful, say family and friends, whether the fugitive Adam will break cover and return to Britain, and certain incarceration, to attend the funeral of his devoted 'Daddy', who died on Monday aged 78.

Better by far to remember the halcyon days of crashes between prison vans and cement mixers which left police looking for '18 hardened criminals' and the laughter surging around his portly frame.

It's goodnight from him, and much thanks and appreciation from the rest of us.



Main picture: With Ronnie Corbett in TV's The Two Ronnies. Above left: Starring opposite Richard Beckinsale in Porridge, and right, with Lynda Baron and David Jason in Open All Hours

successful stars of British light entertainment.

But in 1973, within two years of the Two Ronnies inception, he took part in a one-man show which was to secure his place in the pantheon of greats. Seven Of One was a (now forgotten) series of one-act plays starring Barker. In the first he appeared as Arkwright, a grumpy northern

shopkeeper. Episode two saw him playing a prisoner called Fletcher.

This was showbusiness alchemy. Within a couple of years these two episodes were to be developed into Open All Hours and Porridge, two of the greatest British TV comedy series, both starring Barker.

Barker's central character in both were beautifully observed creations

and though Arkwright is the less celebrated, he was perhaps Barker's triumph, a study in melancholy and frustration, which had as much to do with the actor's input as that of the writer, Roy Clarke.

But by 1987, aged only 57, he had had enough and announced his retirement from acting. 'The reason

RONNIE BARKER
1929-2005 | OBITUARY

A comic gift

What made the late Ronnie Barker great? Friends and colleagues pay tribute to his genius – and there's news of a final curtain call for *The Two Ronnies* at Christmas

The death on 3 October of Ronnie Barker, 76, signals the end of an era of British comedy. He was one of the last of the great comic stars linked to variety theatres and British rep. His career also took in the golden age of radio comedy, the 1960s satire boom, and the heyday of mass-audience 70s light entertainment. But he wasn't just a sketch-and-song man. Barker's strengths were equally deployed in character acting (*Porridge*, *Open All Hours*) and writing, and he wrote much of the *Two Ronnies* material under the nom-de-plume Gerald Wiley.

And there will be a final curtain call for *The Two Ronnies*. Bea Ballard, the BBC's Creative Head of Entertainment who persuaded Barker out of retirement for this year's *Two Ronnies Sketchbook* series, says that the BBC had filmed a Christmas special with them. "Ronnie knew he wasn't well," says Ballard, "and let it be known that should anything happen, he wanted the special to be shown."

Barker was proud of *The Two Ronnies*. Speaking to RT in March this year about the *Sketchbook* series, he said: "I'm pleased these sketches will be seen again. Anyone under 33 wasn't even born when the first series went out. It means a whole new generation will be able to see our antics."

Off-stage, Barker was a self-effacing man. "He never knew what to say if people were praising him," says long-time collaborator Ronnie Corbett – but now colleagues and friends remember one of the greatest comic gifts of the 20th century.



LESLIE PHILLIPS Ronnie was that rare thing – a great actor, comedian and writer. He could do anything. When I first knew him, on radio's *The Navy Lark*, he was a character actor, creating dozens of different characters just with his voice. He always had suggestions as to how

we could make things better; I should have known that he'd go on to write.

When Ronnie retired (in 1987) he was at the top of his career, he could have gone on working for ages, but there was nothing doing. I tried to get him to

go into serious plays, but he wanted to stay in the lighter comic mode. That's what he was good at. I don't think there's any bigger loss possible for British comedy.

MICHAEL PALIN

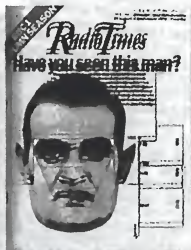
I met Ronnie in the 60s, when Terry Jones and I were hired as writers for *The Frost Report*. Ronnie was one of the stars, and always made us feel part of the team. He was one of the great character actors, along with Peter Sellers. But unlike Sellers, Ronnie was consistent. He knew what worked for him, and was never distracted into other avenues. His lack of overweening ambition was his strength. His best performance was *Porridge*. He thoroughly explored that character (Norman Stanley Fletcher) and kept the comic pressure up. He set the standard to which all other comedy aspires.

PATRICIA BRAKE

Fletcher was Ronnie's greatest performance. I played his daughter, Ingrid, and I'm proud of having worked with him. He was generous as an actor; if he saw you doing something funny, he'd make sure the camera saw it. He didn't want to be the star; he wanted the programme as a whole to be good.

DAVID JASON

Ronnie was a dear friend and someone for whom I had the greatest respect. Working with him was a joy, and were some of the best years of my career. The entertainment world has lost a huge talent, but my thoughts are for his wife, his family and friends who have lost the man they loved so much. **Rupert Smith**



COVER STAR How RT followed the career of comedian and comic actor Ronnie Barker – through *The Two Ronnies* and *Porridge* – from 1971 to 1985

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35p

EXCLUSIVE

BREAST CANCER DRUG ON NHS

By CONNOR BLACKMAN, Political Editor

A WONDER drug that can beat breast cancer is set to be prescribed on the NHS, costing £100million and saving 1,000 women's lives a year. The move to make Herceptin available comes after nurse Barbara Clark, 49, won the right to be given the treatment.

FULL STORY: PAGE 4

GOODNIGHT

In a packed programme tonight we will be talking to an out-of-work contortionist who can no longer make ends meet

The marvellous thing about a joke with a double meaning is that it can only mean one thing

FROM HIM

The toilets at a local police station have been stolen.

Police say they've nothing to go on

Her facial muscles don't know the meaning of the word teamwork

RONNIE BARKER DIES AT 76: PAGES 8 & 9

BECKS SON'S HOSPITAL DASH No3

By CAROLINE HEDLEY

DAVID and Victoria Beckham's son Romeo was in hospital last night after his third fit in three months.

The couple were preparing to take the three-year-old for tests when he collapsed with another convulsion.

He was rushed to a Madrid hospital where doctors embarked on a series of investigations to try to find the cause of the fits.

A family friend said: "They are incredibly worried."

Becks was allowed to miss training with the England squad to be with his son.

SEE PAGE 7

Fears as
little
Romeo
has fit

WORRY: David, Romeo

RONNIE BARKER, GIANT

HIS TOP 10 JOKES

1. THE search for the man who terrorises nudist camps with a bacon slicer goes on. Inspector Lemuel Jones had a tip-off this morning, but hopes to be back on duty tomorrow.
2. HAVE you heard the one about the retired general who said he had not had sex since 1956? His friend said: "That's a long time ago." "I don't know," the general replied, "it's only 20.27 now."
3. THE man who invented the zip fastener was today honoured with a lifetime peerage. He will now be known as the Lord of the Flies.
4. IN a packed programme tonight we will be talking to an out-of-work contortionist who says he can no longer make ends meet.
5. THE toilets at a local police station have been stolen. Police say they have nothing to go on.
6. A NEW publishing venture was announced today, the Stock Breeders Gazette and Playboy magazine are to join to produce the Farmer Sutra.
7. ARNOLD Crump, a 6ft 9ins, ham-fisted, hairy drunk with a short temper, bad breath, acne, dandruff and fleas, was named by Scotland Yard today as Britain's most unwanted man.
8. A FAMOUS Spoonerism from sitcom Open All Hours: "Don't just crit there siticising."
9. GEORGE Mumble the Bodmin man who swallowed 200 weight of laxative for a bet on coronation night has celebrated his Silver Jubilee. He's been on the throne for 25 years.
10. AS prisoner Norman Stanley Fletcher in Porridge, when playing a game of Monopoly: "Would you Adam and Eve it? Go to jail!"

...AND HIS No.1 SKETCH

An edited extract of the hilarious hardware shop sequence.

RONNIE Corbett is assistant in shop.

Ronnie Barker enters:

BARKER: Four Candles!

CORBETT: Four Candles?

BARKER: Four Candles.

(Corbett gets out four candles)

BARKER: No, fork 'andles...andles for forks!

CORBETT (muttering): Thought you said four candles! Next?

BARKER: Got any plugs?

CORBETT: Plugs. What kind of plugs?

BARKER: A rubber one, bathroom.

(Corbett gets bath plugs)

CORBETT: What size?

BARKER: Thirteen amp!

CORBETT: It's electric bathroom

plugs, we call them. Next?

BARKER: O's!

CORBETT: O's?

BARKER: O's. (Corbett gets a hoe)

BARKER: No, no, O's! for the gate.

Mon Repose! O's! Letter O's!

CORBETT: Letter O's! Next

BARKER: Got any P's?

CORBETT: Why didn't you bleedin' tell

me that while I was up there then?

BARKER: No! Tins of peas. Three tins

CORBETT: You're 'avin' me on?

BARKER: I'm not! (Corbett gets peas)

He grabs shopping list and calls to

shop owner Mr Jones to read it.

CORBETT: Look what 'e's got on there!

JONES: How many would ya like?

Opens drawer marked BILL HOOKS

..and it's goodnight from him

SHOWBIZ IN MOURNING FOR RONNIE

SHOWBIZ stars were united in tribute last night to comedy legend Ronnie Barker.

The TV giant, who had a history of heart trouble, died peacefully aged 76 with Joy, his wife of 48 years, at his side.

Ronnie, one of the most versatile comic writers and actors of his generation, brought laughter to millions in sitcoms Porridge and Open All Hours.

But it was with sketch show The Two Ronnies that he achieved worldwide fame.

Partner Ronnie Corbett said: "Ronnie was pure gold in triplicate - as a performer, a writer and a friend."

"We worked together since 1965 and never had a cross word. It was 40 years of harmonious joy, nothing but an absolute pleasure."

"I will miss him terribly, but he went out on a lift."

The late legend, who died on Monday, once said: "I'd like to be remembered as one of the funniest men people have seen on television."

Last night's avalanche of tributes made it clear he got

By FIONA CUMMINS
Showbiz Reporter

his wish. Open All Hours co-star David Jason said: "Working with Ronnie was always a joy and were without doubt some of the best years of my career. The world of entertainment has lost a huge talent."

Monty Python's Michael Palin said: "He had this extra-

ordinary ability to make the nation laugh, probably more often than anyone else I know."

"I count myself enormously fortunate to have known and worked with him."

John Cleese, who began his TV comedy career with him in 60s series The Frost Report, called him "a warm, friendly and encouraging presence to have when I started".

He was "a great

comic actor to learn from", he added. Funnyman Peter Kay said: "He made me laugh so much. I'm just so lucky to have been able to get to know my hero and the person that I aspire to be."

Comedy writer Barry Cryer put him on a par with film legends Alec Guinness and Peter Sellers.

"You couldn't believe it was the same man if you watched Porridge or Open All Hours," he said.

"He was an amazing character actor." In recent weeks Ronnie's wife Joy had helped



STORM: 2002 show



TALL TALES: Ronnies & Cleese in 60s



CHEERY LAUGH: Ronnies' pub sketch

OF COMEDY: 1929-2005

DAILY MIRROR, Wednesday, October 5, 2005

PAGE 9

..and him



GREAT NICK. With Richard Beckinsale in Porridge

..and him



FUN IN STORE. As Arkwright alongside David Jason in Open All Hours

GENIUS
Typical
Barker
fun pose

look after the ailing dad-of-three at home in Chipping Norton, Oxon.

In the last 24 hours of his life he was moved to a hospice, where he died at 12.15pm on Monday.

Corbett, 74, last saw him last week at the filming of ITV's Avenue of the Stars. He said: "He felt weak and didn't look at all well."

"I thought then that Ron was rather resigned to it all. I hope he's in a better place now."

But Ronnie's lasting regret was over son Adam, 38, arrested and bailed in 2003 in a child porn probe but now thought to be in hiding in

France. Carry On star **Leslie Phillips**, a close friend of his dad's, said: "Ronnie suffered because of Adam's situation."

"I doubt Adam ever contacted him since going missing."

"He didn't talk openly about it but I know he was deeply concerned for his welfare and troubled that he had gone missing."

The Two Ronnies ran from 1971 to 1987. Its enduring appeal was proved when it returned to TV this year in The Two Ronnies Sketchbook, a highlight of the best scenes.

The pair's bickering tramps and their Four Candles sketch, in which Barker tries to buy fork handles at a hardware store, still made millions laugh.

Corbett said of his pal: "He was delighted the Two Ronnies Sketchbook had gone so well."

bringing us to a new generation of audiences." Last night BBC1 aired a half-hour special on his life.

This Friday it will repeat a show screened last year to mark his lifetime achievement Bafta.

Ronnie was born Ronald William George Barker in September 25, 1929 in Bedford.

After a spell as a bank clerk, he joined the Manchester Repertory Company as an assistant stage manager and by 1955 was appearing in West End shows such as Midsummer Night's Dream. He met

Corbett when both were writers on The Frost Report in 1966.

After the start of the Two Ronnies, Barker went on to star as Fletcher, opposite Richard Beckinsale, in prison sitcom Porridge.

He also played stuttering shopkeeper Arkwright, his favourite character, in Open All Hours, had other parts in The Saint and The Avengers and wrote several books.

He was awarded an OBE in 1978.

He officially retired in 1997 but was lured back in 1999 to appear in a Two Ronnies retrospective.

And in 2002 he played Winston Churchill's butler Inches in BBC drama The Gathering Storm.

Other tributes to his wide-ranging talent came from the likes of **Bruce Forsyth**, who said: "You can't call Ronnie Barker a comedian - he was an actor and a great writer."

Dos O'Connor said: "He was such a brilliant and versatile actor, a superb comedian and a wonderful wordsmith."

And Two Ronnies producer **Michael Hurll** said: "There was a rhythm to a joke and he was able to show us how that worked. It worked every time."

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DIRTY
JOKES:
Pair as
tramps

AND FINALLY: Pair as newsmen

IN STEP
Stars as
clowns

DEVOTED: With Joy and two children

Voice of the Mirror and Kerber and Black: Page 6

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COMEDY GREATS



RONNIE BARKER

"The comic equivalent of Einstein"
John Cleese



Lieutenant Spicer in *Quality Street*. Photographed a few minutes before my debut as a professional actor.

PREMIERSHIP STAR PROBED OVER RAPE

A PREMIERSHIP superstar is under investigation by police after two women claimed he and a pal raped them at a five-star hotel.

The young international is alleged to have attacked the pair in a £1,000-a-night suite in London's

EXCLUSIVE by MIKE SULLIVAN

West End. The claims are being probed by officers from the Metropolitan Police specialist sex crime unit Operation Sapphire.

Full Story — Page Six

Wednesday, October 5, 2005

30p

www.thesun.co.uk

GOODNIGHT FROM HIM



RONNIE BARKER 1929-2005

SEE PAGES 4, 5, 28 AND 29



Vanished... actor son Adam

Son is on run over 'kid porn'

RONNIE faced heartbreak last year when his son went on the run after facing child porn allegations. Adam Barker, 38, is still a fugitive, and police will be watching to see if he turns up at his father's funeral.

Detectives allegedly found 1,200 obscene computer images at his home in Ealing, West London.

Actor Adam, who appeared in Bond movie *Tomorrow Never Dies*, and BBC shows *Monarch of the Glen* and *Casualty*, fled before he was due to be charged in June, 2004.

He was said to have left his parents a letter saying: "I must apologise for being foolish. You must understand I won't be able to contact you for quite some time."

It was being reported he went to France where sister Charlotte, 43, and brother Larry, 46, live.

Last night *Carry On* actor Leslie Phillips, a family friend, said Ronnie had been devastated.

Leslie, 81, added: "Ronnie didn't talk openly about Adam's plight but I know he was deeply concerned for his welfare."

TRIBUTE

By Ally Ross

Sun TV Critic

THE incomparable Ronnie Barker could write, act, do straight parts or comedy. It was almost obscene for one man to have so much talent. To top it, he appeared in what may be Britain's greatest sitcom.

Everyone over a certain age will have their own memories of him.

But for me he will forever be Fletcher doing *Porridge*. Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais wrote it, but Ronnie Barker really brought life to Norman Stanley Fletcher.

He was almost incapable of mistaking a line, whether Fletcher was conning inmates, sparring verbally with Mr Mackay or telling Godber: "Twenty-three and you want to go straight? What kind of talk is that? You've got your whole life in front of you."

Few of us can claim to know much about the real Ronnie Barker.

But he always maintained: "To get a job where the only thing you have to do is to make people laugh - it's the best job in the world." He succeeded brilliantly.

RONNIE BARKER

MASTER

By THOMAS WHITAKER and JAMIE PYATT

GRIEVING Ronnie Corbett told yesterday how comic genius Ronnie Barker revealed he was "ebbing away" days before he died.

Tearful Barker, who was 76, said the end was near in a last poignant phone call to his Two Ronnies partner.

Corbett, who described his lost pal as a "master craftsman," said sadly: "He told me he was feeling fragile, worn out and weak."

"He said he felt the strength ebbing from him and that he was slipping away. For that reason his death is not a great surprise."

Versatile Barker, plagued for years by heart trouble, died in a hospice 24 hours after being moved from his home in the Oxfordshire village of Dean.

The dad of three was one of Britain's most loved and revered comedy heroes, starring in classic TV shows *The Two Ronnies*, *Porridge* and *Open All Hours*.

Through the 1970s and '80s he created unforgettable characters as *Porridge*'s caustic jailbird Norman Stanley Fletcher and stuttering shopkeeper Arkwright.

His famous Two Ronnies sign-off line - "And it's goodnight from him" - provides the perfect epitaph.

And among the host of tributes paid to him yesterday, BBC chairman Michael Grade got it spot on

As death neared, tearful star told his pal Corbett he was 'ebbing away'

by saying: "We have lost a national treasure. He was a comic actor of real genius."

Yet away from the cameras Barker was painfully shy and intensely private. And he became awkwardly modest whenever he was praised in public.

Joy, his wife of 48 years, and daughter Charlotte, 43, were at his side when he died on Monday.

Corbett, 74, called him "an 18-carat complete character". He said: "He could create hugely comic characters out of nowhere -

and all of such infinite variety. When you think of Fletcher and Arkwright - two completely different men in different settings. But both so real and so funny."

The Two Ronnies - seen again on TV earlier this year introducing hilarious clips from their old shows - last met in the summer to secretly film a Christmas special.

The BBC will now ask Joy for permission to screen it during the festive season. Barker "retired" from telly in 1987, two years after suffering a minor heart attack. He

was worried about his health and had been deeply affected by the deaths in 1984 of fellow comedy giants Tommy Cooper and Eric Morecambe.

He gave up a 45-a-day cigarette habit and moved into a 17th-century Cotswold water mill in Dean. And he opened an antiques shop in nearby Chipping Norton.

But amid constant re-runs of *Porridge* and *Open All Hours*, which endeared him to new generations of fans, he still popped up sporadically on TV.

And last year he was honoured in a special BAFTA tribute show.

Inspired

But his health problems did not go away. In 1995 he had a double heart by-pass and nine months later a blood clot nearly killed him.

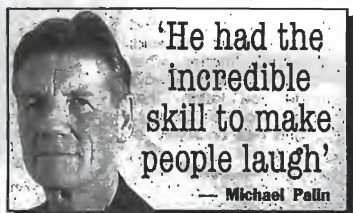
Barker inspired many a modern-day comic - none more than Phoenix Nights star Peter Kay.

He said: "It leaves a huge hole in our lives when somebody like Ronnie passes. Just like Eric Morecambe, you feel you've lost a dear friend. He made me laugh so much and I'm so lucky to have been able to get to know my hero."

Veteran funnyman Ken Dodd said: "Of all the great comedians, he was the best."

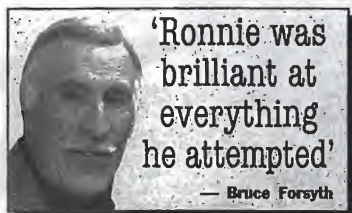
Chat king Michael Parkinson said: "He was uneasy with the fame that came with the job - a man who liked to observe in the shade."

TV car freak and Sun columnist Jeremy Clarkson, a neighbour of the comic, said: "He was part of the fabric of the nation."



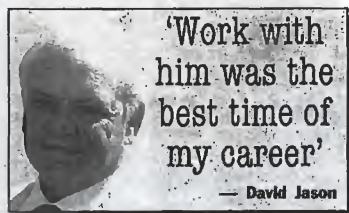
'He had the incredible skill to make people laugh'

— Michael Palin



'Ronnie was brilliant at everything he attempted'

— Bruce Forsyth



'Work with him was the best time of my career'

— David Jason



Rising star... with David Frost in 1968

BANKING ON FAME

RONNIE Barker began his working life as a teenage bank clerk - but found it "totally boring" and headed for the stage.

He worked in rep and on radio comedies in the 1950s. But fame arrived in 1966 when he appeared with Ronnie Corbett in the satirical *Frost Report* - hosted by Sir David Frost.

Five years later the BBC commissioned *The Two Ronnies* and Barker became a household name as 12 series were shown over 16 years. The show pulled in 18 million viewers at its peak.

Porridge - co-starring Fulton Mackay as namesake warden Mr

By THOMAS WHITAKER

Mackay and Richard Beckinsale as young lag Godber - and *Open All Hours*, with David Jason, were also hits. In 1978 Barker, along with Corbett, received an OBE from the Queen, a big fan.

Last month the pair were again honoured as their names were among the first 16 immortalised on the Avenue of the Stars in London's Covent Garden - Britain's equivalent of Hollywood's Walk of Fame.

Both were due to attend the televised launch of the avenue. But ailing Barker pulled out at the last minute. The comic, a

keen collector of Edwardian and Victorian postcards, met wife Joy when she was an assistant stage manager. They wed in 1957 and their marriage was considered one of the strongest in showbiz.

Barker wanted his three children to go into acting and called eldest son Larry after his idol Laurence Olivier.

But Larry, now 48, never fancied it and instead became a successful advertising executive. Daughter Charlotte, 43, and son Adam, 38, both tried showbiz careers but did not make it big.

Curtains were drawn at Barker's home yesterday. A woman thought to be Charlotte appeared at the door looking upset.

1929 - 2005

OF MIRTH



My Joy . . . happy couple wed 48 years



Ss-star . . . Open All Hours with Jason



He maid us laugh . . . as country squire



Horn rims . . . clowning in Two Ronnies



Hat trick . . . with Ronnie Corbett and Josephine Tewson

THE Sun SAYS

VERY few human beings are given the gift of making people laugh their socks off. Ronnie Barker had it in spades . . . or should that be forks?

As half of one of Britain's best-loved double acts he had TV audiences of up to 18 million chuckling.

A brilliant sketch-writer, he also created such memorable telly characters as Norman Stanley Fletcher and Arkwright.

We'll light a candle for you, Ronnie. Hang on, m-m-m-make that f-f-f-four candles.



Doing Porridge . . . with Mackay and Beckinsale

RONNIE BARKER 1929 - 2005 SUN T

Fork Handles



CLASSIC 1976 Two Ronnies sketch. Corbett is behind the hardware shop counter, Barker enters with a list...

BARKER: Four Candles.
CORBETT: Four Candles?
BARKER: Four Candles.
(Corbett makes for a box and gets out four candles. He places them on the counter)
BARKER: No, four candles!
CORBETT *(confused)*: Well there you are, four candles!
BARKER: No, four candles! 'Andles for forks!
(Corbett puts the candles away and goes to get a fork handle. He places it on the counter)
CORBETT *(muttering)*: Fork handles. Thought you said "Four candles!" Next?
BARKER: Got any plugs?
CORBETT: Plugs? What kind of plugs?
BARKER: A rubber one, bathroom.
(Corbett gets out a box of bath plugs and places it on the counter)
CORBETT *(pulling out two different sized plugs)*: What size?
BARKER: Thirteen amp!
CORBETT *(muttering)*: It's electric bathroom plugs we call them in the trade. Electric bathroom plugs!
(He puts the box away, gets out another box and places on the counter an electric plug, then puts the box away)
BARKER: Saw tips!
CORBETT: Saw tips? *(he doesn't know what he means)* What d'you want? Ointment, or something like that?
BARKER: No, saw tips for covering saws.
CORBETT: Oh, haven't got any, haven't got any. *(He mutters)* Comin' in, but we haven't got any. Next?
BARKER: 'Osel!
CORBETT: 'Ose?
BARKER: 'Ose.
(He goes to get a hoe and places it on the counter)
BARKER: No... 'osel!
CORBETT: 'Osel I thought you said hoses! *(he takes the hoe back, and gets a hose, while muttering)* When you said 'ose, I thought you said hoses!
(He places the hose on the counter)
BARKER: No, 'osel!
CORBETT *(confused for a moment)*: 'Ose? Oh, you mean panty 'osel *(he picks up a pair of tights from beside him)*
BARKER: No, no, O's. O's for the gate. Mon repositel O's! Letter o's!
CORBETT *(finally realising)*: Letter o's!
(Muttering) You had me going there!
(He climbs up a stepladder, gets a box down, puts the ladder away, takes the box to the counter and searches through it for letter o's)
CORBETT: How many d'you want?
BARKER: Two.
(Corbett leaves two letter o's on the counter, then takes the box back, gets the ladder out again, puts the box away, climbs down the ladder, puts the ladder away, then returns to the counter)
CORBETT: Yes, next?
BARKER: Got any p's?
CORBETT *(fed up)*: For Gawd's sake, why didn't you bleedin' tell me that while I was up

there then? I'm up and down the shop already, it's up and down the bleedin' shop all the time. *(He gets the ladder, climbs up and gets the box of letters down, then puts the ladder away)*
CORBETT: Honestly, I've got all this shop, I ain't got any help, it's worth it we plan things. *(He puts the box on the counter and gets out some letter p's)* How many d'you want?
BARKER: Nol Tins of peas.
CORBETT: Three tins of peas!
CORBETT: You're 'avin' me on, ain't ya, yer 'avin' me on?
BARKER: I'm not!
(Corbett dumps the box under the counter and gets three tins of peas)
CORBETT *(placing the tins on the counter)*: Next?
BARKER: Got any pumps?
CORBETT *(getting really fed up)*: 'And pumps, foot pumps? Come on!
BARKER *(surprised he has to ask)*: Foot pumps!
CORBETT *(muttering, as he goes down the shop)*: Foot pumps. See a foot pump? *(He sees one, and picks it up)*. Tidy up in 'ere.
(He puts the pump down on the counter)
BARKER: No, pumps fer ya feet! Brown pump, size nine!
CORBETT *(almost at breaking point)*: You are 'avin' me on, you are definitely 'avin' me on!
BARKER *(not taking much notice of Corbett's mood)*: I'm not!
CORBETT: You are 'avin' me on! *(he takes back the pump, gets a pair of brown plimsolls out of a drawer and places them on the counter)* Next?
BARKER: Washers!
CORBETT *(really close to breaking point)*: What? Dishwashers, floor washers, car washers, windscreen washers, back scrubbers, lavatory cleaners or floor washers?
BARKER: 'All inch washers!
CORBETT: Oh, tap washers, tap washers? *(He finally breaks and makes to confiscate the list)* Look, I've had just about enough of this. Give us that list. *(He mutters)* I'll get it all myself!
(Reading through the list) What's this? What's that? Oh that does it! That just about does it! I have just about had it! *(Calling through to the back)* Mr Jones! You come out and serve this customer please. I have just about had enough of 'im. *(Mr Jones comes out and Corbett shows him the list)* Look what 'e's got on there! Look what 'e's got on there!
MR JONES *(who goes to a drawer with a towel hanging out of it and opens it)*: Right! How many would ya like? One or two?
(He removes the towel to reveal the label on the drawer - "Bill hooks.")

SO, it's goodnight from Ronnie Barker for the very last time.

The world is a sadder place today following the loss of one of Britain's

greatest comedians. Here, MARTY PHILLIPS recalls some of his funnies from hit shows. Ron will long be remembered for our smiles.

The fun Ron

The Daily Telegraph

NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

LENNON AT 65

The John I knew and what he'd be like today

Arts Page 23



BEE SHAFER

Meet fashion's most powerful teenager (and our new columnist)

Style Page 20



FANTASY FOOTBALL

Sport Page S6

www.telegraph.co.uk

BRITAIN'S BEST-SELLING QUALITY DAILY

Wednesday, October 5, 2005 No 46,756 60p

A licence for raves with no chance to object

By Philip Johnston
Home Affairs Editor

RAVE parties or festivals lasting up to four days and involving as many as 500 people able to drink round the clock will be allowed without the public having any right to object under the new Licensing Act, it emerged yesterday. Council leaders called on ministers to rethink proposals that would allow temporary licences to be issued without taking into account the concerns of residents.

dents living close to premises where permitted temporary activities may take place and the desire to put in place a liberal and light touch regime". It adds: "Only the police may object to the giving of a temporary event notice and then only on grounds relating to the prevention of crime and disorder. "It is then for the licensing authority to decide whether or not the objection given by the police should be upheld. "No objection may be given

And it's goodnight from him



Diabetes 'will kill an extra 8,000 a year'

By Celia Hall
Medical Editor

DEATHS from diabetes could rise by 25 per cent in the next 10 years because of Britain's obesity epidemic, a World Health Organisation report warns today.

It estimates that there will be 8,000 extra deaths annually from diabetes by 2015, confirming the worst fears of campaigners. At present an estimated 33,000 deaths a year are caused by diabetes.

The report, *Preventing Chronic Disease, a Vital Investment*, says that within a decade 76 per cent of British men and 69 per cent of women will be overweight compared to 65 per cent of men and 55 per cent of women in 1995.

Being overweight is a risk factor for type 2 diabetes and diabetes is a risk factor for heart disease.

"These figures confirm our worst fears," said Simon O'Neill, the director of care

any one police would be able to lodge formal objections - and then only on crime and disorder grounds. At the same time, ministers are still resisting pressure from village halls and other small venues to remove restrictions on running occasional events without having to apply for full alcohol licences.

The Act, which comes into force on Nov 24, replaces legislation under which magistrates issue alcohol licences and councils give permission for public entertainment.

From next month, local authorities take full licensing responsibility, including issuing temporary event notices ('tens') to people who do not want or need a full licence.

The Government says it wants this to be a "light touch" regime to minimise bureaucracy - but council chiefs fear it is too loose and open to abuse.

Under the new rules: each event may have up to 499 people, including staff and organisers, attending at any time and may last for a maximum of 96 hours. Any one venue is limited to 12 'tens' a year.

A Department for Culture, Media and Sport consultation paper says the new system is "intended to strike a balance between the rights of residents or from councils."

"There would be no discretion to act in the best interests of the community."

"This 'new regime was meant to be about giving more power to the people yet local residents would not be able to lodge any objections."

"There is clearly something very wrong that needs to be addressed speedily."

At present magistrates can issue "occasional permissions" for the sale of alcohol at events and may attach any condition they consider fit.

"The Government says the new regime will be 'more streamlined', less bureaucratic and cheaper."

atives - the prevention of public nuisance [for example, noise], public safety and the protection of children."

The paper notes that "where a temporary event notice is given for the purpose of authorising sales of alcohol, the authorisation covers such sales for 24 hours a day and a possible duration of four days."

The consultation over the new rules ends today but few are happy with what the Government is proposing.

Local government leaders say the laws will exclude the public from any say in whether temporary events should be allowed.

Small venues, such as village halls, complain that the annual limit of 12 'tens' is too restrictive and will stop many activities, such as regular quiz evenings and charity nights, taking place.

Tessa Jowell, the Culture Secretary, has said she intends to keep the limits set out in the Act but may be prepared to vary the number "if experience showed the existing limits were either unnecessary or not sufficiently restrictive."

Sir Sandy Bruce-Lockhart, the chairman of the Local Government Association, said councils were concerned that the Act would allow potentially disruptive events to go ahead with no input from residents or from councils.

"There would be no discretion to act in the best interests of the community."

"This 'new regime was meant to be about giving more power to the people yet local residents would not be able to lodge any objections."

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"The Government says the new regime will be 'more streamlined', less bureaucratic and cheaper."

ations, with the oldest and youngest contenders going head to head on the same day. It put David Davis, the current front-runner, in his leadership contest, and his pressure to deliver equally impressive performances when they address the conference today.

Mr Clarke and Mr Cameron are battling it out for second place on the ballot paper to be sent to party activists, who will have the final say in early December on who should succeed Michael Howard.

Last night, there were signs that both men had gained momentum from their conference performances, with some of Mr Davis's supporters reported to be reconsidering their position. While Mr Davis remains in front, with at least 66 backers, the race is

more open and unpredictable than it appeared at the start of the conference. Mr Clarke was making his first platform speech to a party conference since 1996,

Mr Cameron delighted his supporters with a 15-minute speech, made without notes, in which he declared he wanted to make people feel good about being Conservatives again.

His optimism and enthusiasm led some activists to describing him as the 'Tony Blair' equivalent of the young Tony Blair.

Mr Clarke's strong showing with the party activists prompted concern among Euro-sceptics that he could split the party if he became leader.

Bill Cash, a leading Eurosceptic, announced that he was considering standing for the leadership to block Mr Clarke.

Mr Cash told ITV News that Mr Clarke could not be allowed to get his hands on power because of his continuing support for European integration.

Mr Davis will seek today to regain the initiative by rebuking party modernisers for running down the party himself as the straight-talking candidate who will lead the party from the front.

Reports: Pages 8-9
Matthew d'Ancona and Stephen Robinson: Page 26
Editorial Comment: Page 27

nosed or in high-risk groups are getting the care and education they need, it could literally be taking years off people's lives.

"We know Type 2 diabetes is linked to being overweight, so people must be educated to eat a healthy diet and take regular physical activity or the numbers will continue to rise at an alarming rate."

The WHO report says that efforts to prevent illnesses such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes could save the lives of 36 million people worldwide who would otherwise be dead by 2015.

In Britain alone, 468,000 deaths will be from chronic diseases, it says.

The report sets a goal of reducing the projected trend of chronic disease death rates around the world by two per cent a year until 2015.

One advantage would be a reduction in the cost of treatment and of lost productivity caused by premature deaths.

The extra two per cent reduction in chronic disease death rates in Britain would result in an economic gain of £1.14 billion over 10 years.

The report says Britain had made good progress in reducing deaths from chronic disease, estimating that between 1970 to 2000 three million heart deaths were averted.

Dr Joanne Epping-Jordan, a WHO programme adviser, said Britain was a role model in reducing heart disease deaths over 30 years.

A Department of Health spokesman said: "The Government has made tackling the big killer diseases a top priority. This report highlights the success of NHS Stop Smoking Services, the S-A-DAY programme to increase fruit and vegetable consumption and our programmes to reduce salt consumption."

"But there is still much more that needs to be done. There are still inequalities nationally - and internationally - in who gets and who dies from chronic diseases."

REPORT BY MICHAEL WOOD

REPORT BY MICHAEL WOOD

Big beast' Clarke puts pressure on Davis



By George Jones
Political Editor

KENNETH Clarke stormed back to the centre of the political stage last night with a rousing speech to the Conservative conference in Blackpool in which he described himself as a "prime minister-in-waiting" who could put the Tories back in power.

The former chancellor, making his third attempt to become Tory leader, upstaged a confident and polished performance earlier in the day by David Cameron, at 38 the youngest contender in the leadership contest.

While Mr Clarke, 65, said he had the experience to defeat Gordon Brown, who was likely to lead Labour into the next election, Mr Cameron pledged to "inspire a new generation of Conservatives".

The clash of the general election contenders was ahead with no input from residents or from councils.

"There would be no discretion to act in the best interests of the community."

"This 'new regime was meant to be about giving more power to the people yet local residents would not be able to lodge any objections."

"There is clearly something very wrong that needs to be addressed speedily."

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"The Government says the new regime will be 'more streamlined', less bureaucratic and cheaper."

DIGEST

NEWS

The Met Office is attempting to make forecasts more relevant and uplifting for the people who watch them before deciding what to do or wear each day. P5

A financial consultant for the Halifax bank left an IOU for £7 million in a branch safe after he stole up to £10 million from customers' accounts. P11

Twins from a poor Indian family who are joined at the head are to be separated. P16

WORLD NEWS

A British Muslim described as a possible "missing link" to the July 7 London bombers has said from prison in Pakistan that he is innocent and wants to return home. P14

Labour's campaign to increase the number of state pupils at leading universities may amount to 'social engineering'. P13

SPORT

Football: Ashley Cole, the Arsenal defender, will miss England's World Cup qualifiers against Austria and Poland because of a stress fracture of the foot. S1

Jimmy Greaves, the Spurs Stop Smoking Services, the S-A-DAY programme to increase fruit and vegetable consumption and our programmes to reduce salt consumption.

"But there is still much more that needs to be done. There are still inequalities nationally - and internationally - in who gets and who dies from chronic diseases."

MARKETS

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CROSSWORD

1 Across: A word of praise for a person who is very good at their job. 2 Down: A word of praise for a person who is very good at their job.



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ALSTAR/BBC/PA



THE TWO RONNIES He was 'pure gold', says Ronnie Corbett, his comedy partner for 40 years



PORRIDGE As Norman Stanley Fletcher, the incorrigible inmate, with warder Fulton Mackay



The Barker gags

The man who invented the zip fastener was today honoured with a lifetime peerage. He will now be known as the Lord of the Files.

In a packed programme tonight we will be talking to an out-of-work contortionist who says he can no longer make ends meet.

Have you heard the one about the retired general who said he had not had sex since 1956? His friend said, 'That's a long time ago.' 'I don't know,' the general replied, 'it's only 20.27 now.'

The search for the man who terrorises nudist camps with a bacon slicer goes on. Inspector Lemuel Jones had a tip-off this morning, but hopes to be back on duty tomorrow.

The marvellous thing about a joke with a double meaning is that it can only mean one thing.

Following the dispute with the domestic servants' union at Buckingham Palace today, the Queen, a radiant figure in a white silk gown and crimson robe, swept down the main staircase and through the hall. She then dusted the cloakroom and vacuumed the lounge.

And we've heard from a very disappointed guest at the Charles Dickens Society's annual nudist weekend. He had Great Expectations, but it was a very Bleak House and everybody laughed at his Little Dorrit.



THE ENTERTAINER Reunited with Ronnie Corbett for a one-off Two Ronnies show produced for the BBC in 1999

Family and police wait to see if runaway son returns for funeral

By Catriona Davies

THE Barker family and the police will be waiting to see whether Ronnie's youngest son Adam, who skipped bail after being arrested for downloading child pornography from the internet, returns for his father's funeral.

Adam Barker, 38, an unmarried actor who played bit parts in *Shakespeare in Love* and *Tomorrow Never Dies*, has not been seen for 16 months since he disappeared shortly before he was expected to be charged with paying for child pornography on the internet.

He had been one of 7,000 men arrested as part of Operation Ore, a crackdown on subscribers to internet child pornography sites.

He was arrested in June 2003. His home in Ealing, west London, where he lived four doors from his sister Charlotte, 42, was searched and a computer seized.

It was 10 months before officers got round to analysing the computer, during which Barker complied with

JEFF SPICER



Ronnie Barker with his wife and son Adam before his arrest

the terms of his bail. The computer hard drive had been smashed, but officers were able to analyse its content.

On June 24, 2004, Barker was due to report for bail at Southall police station and was expected to be charged.

He never turned up, and his mobile phone, credit cards and bank accounts have remained untouched. When his sister Charlotte let officers into his house, it appeared that his escape had been well-planned. It later emerged that

wait and find out what will happen. I will go away. You must understand that I won't be able to contact you for quite some time.

"Rest assured. I will not harm myself; I would rather come back."

Lots of love, Adam." Those were probably the last words Barker heard from his son. Police believe Adam went to France. He speaks fluent French and his older brother Larry, 45, lives in a chateau with a vineyard near Bordeaux with his wife and two children.

Ronnie never spoke publicly about his son's disappearance but was said to be devastated.

Larry Barker said shortly after Adam went missing: "He should do the right thing and go home to face the music. We haven't seen him. We are shocked and upset by what has happened."

Scotland Yard confirmed yesterday that Adam would be arrested if he returned. A spokesman said: "If he returns the matter will be dealt with with the utmost sensitivity."



Obituary

Ronnie Barker

Comedian who became a national favourite in The Two Ronnies, Porridge and Open All Hours

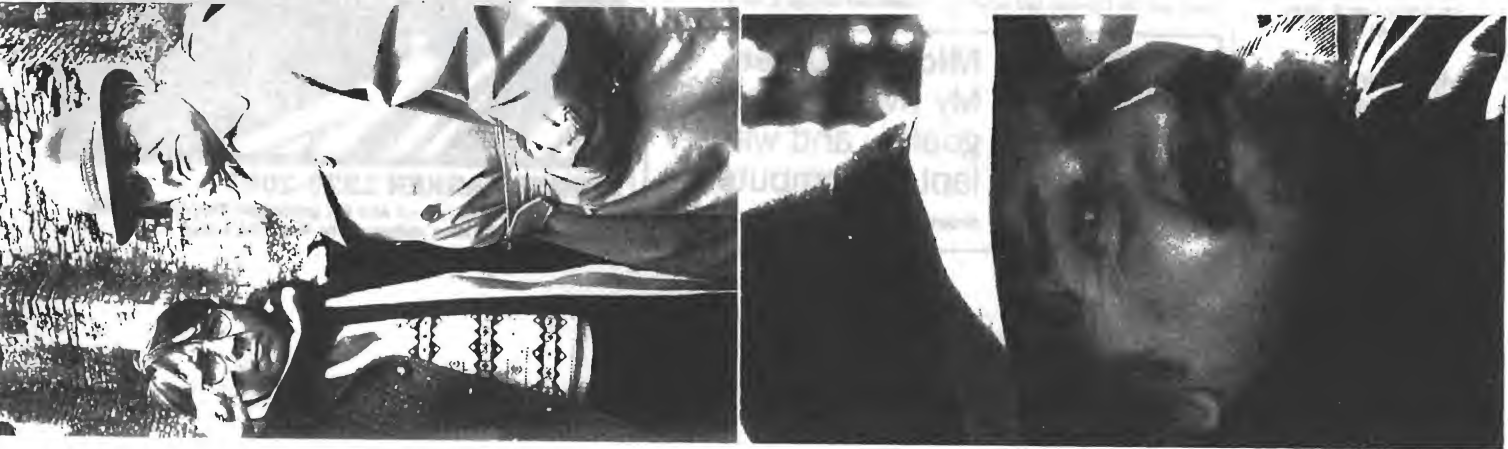
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CLIVE POSTLETHWAITE

Barker outside his antique shop in Chipping Norton High Street, to which he retired in 1988 after a career in which he worried constantly about the quality of scripts and performances





RONNIE BARKER, who died on Monday aged 76, was a comedian, actor and scriptwriter who earned both fame and public affection for his appearances in television shows such as *The Two Ronnies*, *Open All Hours* and *Porridge*.

Barker did not look like a television comedian – his 15 and a half stones and conservative taste in dress gave him the appearance of a man doing moderately well in a chartered accountancy; but his ample build and ability to project an air of unclouded bonhomie provided the perfect counterpoint in his double act with Ronnie Corbett.

The Two Ronnies, with scripts co-written by Barker himself under the pen-name of Gerald Wiley, became a national institution, especially dear to admirers of the *double entendre*. The programme's forte was "honest, vulgar" comedy combined with elements of the more cerebral "new comedy" of John Cleese.

Barker's own writing for the show tended to reflect his fascination with nonsense verse and word-play. His scripts included the incoherent Minister of Communication, the man who could speak only in Limericks, and which (the skits had a literary bias) concluded with a reference to Charles Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities*. One of the best-remembered sketches from the show was set in a hardware shop, where the customer is presented with four candles, after asking for "fork handles".

The impact of *Porridge* was far greater than the number of episodes filmed (20) might suggest, and made many wonder what Barker would have achieved had he directed all his energies into acting. Sir Alec Guinness was one of many classical actors who greatly admired Barker's genius for characterisation.

The part of Norman Stanley Fletcher – Barker said that he modelled the character on his father – was probably his most successful television role. The gun-chewing "Fletcher" fond of mauling his fellow convicts to "nauf off", was a likeable rogue whose mixture of cunning and charm allowed him to beat the system from the inside.

Ronald William George Barker was born at Bedford on September 25 1929 and brought up in Oxford. From Donnington Junior School he went on to Oxford High School, where he opened his chemistry textbook to find the name TE Lawrence inscribed on the flyleaf.

Although there was no acting tradition in the family – his father was a clerk for Shell Mex – Ronnie became fascinated by Laurence Olivier's performance in the film version of *Henry V*, and played truant in order to view the picture repeatedly, even though the cinema entrance was in full view of

the headmaster's study window. Before taking the Higher School Certificate, he left school to enrol at architectural college in Oxford; but he found the long hours unpalatable, and instead joined the Westminster Bank as a junior clerk.

Barker maintained his interest in drama by taking part in the local amateur dramatic group, and made regular trips to Aylesbury Rep. In 1949 he took an afternoon off work, auditioned, and accepted a job (starting that night) with the company, the Aylesbury branch of the Manchester Repertory Players.

When the Aylesbury section closed down, Barker was transferred to a Welsh branch of the same company; that, too, collapsed, and he went back to Oxford to take a job as a porter at the Wingfield Hospital. The experience of working with polo victims shook him but, as he later remarked, proved invaluable in giving him a broad and compassionate perspective in his comedy.

Barker continued to apply for jobs advertised in the *Stage*, one of which brought a two-year spell in rep at Bramhall, after which he joined the Oxford Playhouse, where he met the young Maggie Smith – and told her: "If I were you, I'd give up."

When Peter Hall arrived as director of the Playhouse company, he took Barker to London with him for *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1955); this opened the way for other West End productions, notably *Lysistrata* and *Irma La Douce* (both 1958), and radio shows such as *The Navy Lark*, in which he appeared for nine years.

He married his wife, Joy Tubbs, in 1957, having met her the previous year while appearing in *The Letter* at the Cambridge Arts Theatre, where she was assistant stage manager. Barker first saw her from behind, while she was bending down to pick up a prop: "I immediately thought: 'That's the girl for me'."

He continued to work in the theatre throughout the 1960s, and in 1964 was complimented by Eric Shorter for his contribution to *All in Love* (a mediocre musical based on *The Roads*), in which *The Daily Telegraph's* critic detected "extra malapropisms".

In July 1965 Barker appeared in the minor classic *A Home of Your Own*, a short wordless satire on the habits of the British builder, with Bernard Cribbins and Fred Emney. It was Jimmy Gilbert, a BBC producer, who recommended Barker for *The Frost Report* in 1966.

David Frost himself suggested Ronnie Corbett, whom he had seen on scene at Danny La Rue's club in London; also appearing in the show were Marty Feldman, Tim Brooke-Taylor, Bill Oddie and John Peel, who played the upper-class part in sketches with Corbett and Barker satirising, with the aid of their absurdly differing physical

social structure.

Barker later said that he found most of the *Frost Report* team "rather 'Varsity'"; as an old Oxford High man, he presumably caught the scent of "town and gown" in the air. He recalled how he and Corbett (whom he had previously met in the latter's capacity as barman at a late-night drinking club in Soho) tended to stick together "as grammar-school boys among graduates", to the point where they came to be seen as a team, and followed David Frost to Rediffusion for *At Last the 1948 Show* (1967), and *Frost On Sunday* (1968).

The *Two Ronnies*, which began in 1971, quickly established a successful formula which was based on deliberately naive caricatures of British life: bumbling colonels, retarded yokels and bosomy barmen. Corbett and Barker generated sympathy in viewers to the point where they were able to carry all this off with natural accents, which was still a handicap in mainstream comedy. The success of the shows was the result of solid scripts; with the exception of "It's goodnight from him" at the end of the news items that closed the show, there was little reliance on catchphrases (far less, for instance, than in many other fashionable shows of the period, including the "completely different" *Monty Python's Flying Circus*).

At the start of its 16-year run, the BBC was investing heavily in "classic" serials: a spoof such as Gerald Wiley's Hampton Wick relied on its topicality, as did that of *Colditz*, in which Wiley's script was an earlier version of the Empire-bashing skits in *Monty Python* ("This place is impregnable," one despairing POW complains, prompting Corbett to reflect: "That's what they said about Doreen Phipps. How wrong they were.")

Music was provided by regular favourites such as Big Jim Josaphat and Patsy Jones, the American folk singers. One of the programme's main features was a spot for an irreverent chorus of songs, for example *Singing Low Sheet Harriet*, performed by the Plumstead Ladies' Male Voice Choir. The show concluded with a round-up of spoof news items of the 1980s with shows such as *Open All Hours*. At the time, the theories of Sigmund Freud with those of Albert Einstein and got sex at the speed of light "variety".

The comparative subtlety of Barker's verbal gags limited the show's export potential, and it never travelled as well as, for example, *The Benny Hill Show*, though there was some success in America – in February 1978 the *Washington Post's* television page advertised a broadcast by Ronald Reagan with the headline "The One Ronnie".

In 1971, the same year that *The*

Two Ronnies began, *Six Dates With Barker* gave notice of what the comedian could do as a television character actor. Each of the Friday night shows was the work of a different writer, and the series began with a play by Hugh Leonard, *The Remains Person*, in which Barker played Fred, a short-sighted removal man (he was to take a similar role in his final television series, *Clarence*).

In John Cleese's *Come in and Lie Down*, Barker played a ebullient psychiatrist faced by an impatient gas-meter reader with anarchic views on the nature of reality. The last of the acclaimed series, *All the World's a Stage*, was by Gerald Wiley himself, and set in the year AD 2774, in a country where custard pies were the compulsory breakfast menu and old jokes were the only permitted form of conversation.

Porridge (1974-77) provided Barker with exceptional scripts and a superb supporting cast: Richard Beckinsale as Lennie Goodber; Brian Wilde as the whingeing liberal, Mr Barrowclough; Brian Glover as the prison dupe – all under the watchful eye of Fulton Mackay. Fletcher's character, despite his cynicism, was endearing enough to draw compliments from those with experience of genuine incarceration.

When John R Watson, the former governor of Wakefield Prison, wrote to *The Daily Telegraph* to complain about a *Panorama* report on the 1977 riots in Hull prison, he added that "the humour, repartee and understanding in Ronnie Barker's not in fact, the scriptwriter (the series was by Dick Clement and Jan La Frenais), but Watson was right to consider *Porridge* to be Ronnie Barker's show; and it was Fletcher who received letters from convicts saying that the series "felt right". In 1978 Fletcher went home to Muswell Hill in *Going Straight*, only to find that his wife had left him for a cardboard box mogul, obliging him to run the menage with his daughter Ingrid (Patricia Brake) and Godber.

The *Porridge* cycle ended in 1979 with the death of Richard Beckinsale at the age of 31; it devastated Barker, who had been close to the young actor.

Barker carried his successful solo career through the 1970s and into the 1980s with shows such as *Open All Hours*. At the time, the waddling, stammering Yorkshire shopkeeper who divided his time between satisfying his roaring avarice and attempting to control his lust for the district nurse, Gladys (Lynda Baron), failed to win over the critics on his first appearance in 1976; but he went on, supported by David Jason, as the frustrated nepotist Granville, to run to four series.

Barker was less convincing as Evans the Flash, the eccentric photographer in *The Magnificent*

Evans (1984), which managed only one series, nor was his public quite so taken with *Clarence*.

Just before *Clarence's* first appearance, Barker had taken the decision to retire following the 1987 *Two Ronnies Christmas Show*. Worries about having dried up only 20 per cent of the show's scripts, compared with up to 75 per cent in the early days), and a feeling of having achieved all his professional ambitions, were compounded by anxiety about his health; he had suffered from high blood pressure since 1976 and he was badly shaken by the deaths of Eric Morecambe, Tommy Cooper and Leonard Rossiter.

On New Year's Day 1988 Barker retired to his converted watermill in Oxfordshire, devoting his energies to ordering his collection of 70,000 Edwardian and Victorian picture postcards (some of the saucer ones were published in anthologies such as his *Book of Barbling Beauties*), and to running his antique shop, The Emporium, in Chipping Norton High Street.

Though his modesty was charming, few could have accepted Ronnie Barker's own, frequently repeated, description of himself as a "jobbing actor". In an age in which television audiences were increasingly unable to distinguish inferior material from poor artistic performance, it was Barker's felicitous position as comedian and writer – he agonised constantly over the quality of his scripts – which sustained *The Two Ronnies* for so long, and which made it superior to competing acts. Sir Peter Hall, who was keen for him to play Falstaff at the National Theatre (Barker refused because he could not face the traffic between Finner and the South Bank), described him as "the great actor we lost".

Ten years after his retirement, Barker popped up briefly as the author of *Mum*, a play written for his daughter Charlotte, staged at the King's Head, Islington. He returned to the television screen in 2002-03 in the part of Churchill's butler in the film *The Gathering Storm*, starring Albert Finney, Vanessa Redgrave and Derek Jacobi.

Recently he was seen again on television in *The Two Ronnies Sketchbook*, in which he and Corbett looked back at some of the best sketches from their long-running show.

Barker received British Academy Awards in 1975, 1977 and 1978; a Royal Television Society award for outstanding creative achievement in 1975; and lifetime achievement awards in 1990 and 1996.

In 1978 he was appointed OBE. He published a number of books, including an autobiography, *Dancing in the Moonlight* (1993).

Ronnie Barker is survived by his wife and by their two sons and a daughter.

THE TIMES

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ZWC

When a husband takes
a lover online **ASK BEL MOONEY**
times2

Bishops challenge Bible's accuracy

Roman Catholic bishops have published a document instructing the faithful that some parts of the Bible are not true. They say that the Church must offer the gospel in ways "appropriate to changing times".

NEWS page 4

Bush pledge

President Bush, facing mounting anger among his right-wing supporters over runaway spending, was forced to declare yesterday: "I'm still a conservative, proudly so."

NEWS page 45

Fair weather

The Meteorological Office has issued an edict to Britain's television forecasters telling them to look on the bright side and be more positive about the nation's weather.

NEWS page 3

Failing schools

Many children are starting secondary school unable to read or write properly because of poor teaching, school inspectors have found.

NEWS page 14

No settlement

The Bank of England has blocked an attempt by Deloitte to abandon the most expensive litigation in British corporate history.

BUSINESS page 48

Cole blow

A tense and testing week for Sven-Göran Eriksson grew in complexity yesterday when he lost Ashley Cole to injury.

SPORT page 96

My Notting Hill:
more a state of
mind than a place

MICHAEL GOVE times2

COMMENT 18 | WEATHER 75
BUSINESS 48 | TELEVISION &
REGISTER 69 | RADIO times2

Tory race is thrown wide open

■ David Davis feels the squeeze

By Philip Webster
Political Editor

THE Conservative leadership race was thrown wide open last night after Kenneth Clarke and David Cameron took the party conference by storm with passionate well-acclaimed speeches describing their longing to get the Tories back into power.

David Davis, the long-time front-runner, was under pressure to produce the speech of his life today as even his own supporters admitted that the performances of Mr Clarke and Mr Cameron had given them hope of winning if they get through to the final nationwide ballot.

Mr Davis is virtually assured of reaching the run-off because of the strength of his support among MPs.

But his backers conceded that he would have a fight on his hands when the contest moves to the party's 300,000 members this month. The result of their nationwide ballot will be declared on December 6.

Mr Davis is being urged privately to drop the "safety-first" approach that has characterised the opening of his campaign, which supporters believe has almost been forced upon him by the knowledge that he is so far ahead among the MPs.

Friends of Mr Davis said that Mr Clarke and Mr Cameron had shown in

their different ways — Mr Cameron with a visionary speech aimed at inspiring a new generation of Conservatives and Mr Clarke with a vintage assault on Labour — how they could enthuse the membership. They accepted that Mr Davis would have to respond.

Some of Mr Davis's strong backers hope that he can win 100 MPs to his side after the early ballots to send an unmistakable signal to the members that he is their runaway choice. Like most of the other candidates Mr Davis has already begun his campaign to woo the membership with a team of volunteers telephoning councillors and activists.

Mr Davis and Liam Fox, the Shadow Foreign Secretary, are the last of the contenders to make their appeals to the conference today.

The Shadow Home Secretary will tell members that the party's goal is "power — but power with a moral purpose".

Emphasising his belief that the Conservatives must stand up for all sections of society, he will say: "For us, government is a means. It is not an end in itself. It is a means to liberate those locked into dependence, to enfranchise those whose voice goes unheard and to empower those who cannot fight back."

Mr Davis plans to tell the Conservatives to "walk tall, stop apologising and get on with the job".

Dr Fox will define his territory

Continued on page 2, col 3

'I think it's better to make
people laugh rather than cry'



RONNIE BARKER 1929-2005

Touched by genius, times2 And it's goodnight from him, leading article, page 19 Times obituary, The Register, pages 69, 70



Michael Owen
My five greatest
goals — and win a
laptop computer

SPORT pages 94, 95

The last laugh



The late
Ronnie Barker
made Britain
laugh for
almost half
a century.
JOE JOSEPH
pays tribute to
his comic
genius, and we
recall some of
Barker's classic
moments

Above: Barker was instantly recognisable by his trademark spectacle frames. Facing page, the nation's favourite sketch

As with so many great comedians, what made Ronnie Barker so funny was not so much what he said, but often what he didn't say. Like Clint Eastwood in his spaghetti western movies, Ronnie Barker understood the potency of letting the tension build before delivering a line, filling the pause with an expression that often said more than his imminent punchline.

In comedy, timing is everything, as it is in so much great art. The pianist Artur Schnabel once said: "The notes I handle no better than many pianists. But the pauses between the notes — ah, that is where the art resides!" Barker shared that genius. He was able to make audiences laugh even more at his pauses than at his words. Often it was when Barker's face — by turns lugubrious, impish, hurt — merely hinted at what the punchline might be that we laughed the hardest. Getting people to laugh by saying nothing might look easy, but it is a trick that only the greatest comedians can pull off.

Barker belonged to that generation which formed a bridge between the sauciness of

Max Miller's music-hall patter that always hinted but rarely said anything fruitier than "fig", and the Eighties breed of "alternative" comics who often relied on nothing more than hissing the word "Thatcher" to trigger Pavlovian guffaws from their audiences.

With his long-standing, but short, partner Ronnie Corbett, Barker revelled in the old-fashioned comedy sketch — word play ("Four candles? No, fork handles"); singing songs in the guise of yokels, dressing up as women — which once formed the bedrock of Saturday night family television, along with shows like *Morecambe & Wise*.

Although he turned Norman Stanley Fletcher, the star of Dick Clement's and Ian La Frenais's *Porridge*, into one of the most memorable characters of British sitcom, alongside Alf Garnett and Basil Fawlty, it was the warmth of his personality that filtered like sunlight through episode after episode of *The Two Ronnies* that made Barker so loved.

It wasn't just that, physically, Barker fitted so perfectly as the middle-class man in the famous *Frost Report* sketch in which John

Cleese, Barker and Corbett conveyed a visual portrait of Britain's class divides; Barker, throughout a long career, always came across as an emblem and a representative of middle England. He could have been a bank manager. It surprised nobody to learn that when he quit showbusiness he became an antiques dealer in the Cotswolds. Unlike

Often it was when Barker's face — by turns lugubrious, impish, hurt — merely hinted at what the punchline might be that we laughed hardest

many TV performers who were larger than life, or who fanned out their feathers like peacocks when they walked off the street and into the beam of a TV studio spotlight, Barker always looked as if he had just arrived by bus from his three-bedroomed semi in the suburbs, and would be returning there just as soon as the cameras were switched off again.

He shunned the limelight, rarely gave interviews, and described himself as "really boring without a script" — even though he was the author of many of the *Two Ronnies* sketches.

You could imagine Bruce Forsyth or Jimmy Tarbuck playing in celebrity golf tournaments. But you could only imagine Barker walking his dog. It was perhaps fitting that he was rare among stars in being recognisable by the shorthand of his sensible black spectacle frames.

Comedy classic: The Two Ronnies on marriage

Ronnie Corbett: Do you think marriage is a lottery?

Ronnie Barker: No. In a lottery you do have a slight chance.

RC: But you like women, don't you?

RB: Oh, yes. Just give me my pipe, the great outdoors and a beautiful girl, and you can keep the pipe and the great outdoors. Still, that's nothing to do with marriage, is it? It's just the opposite sex.

RC: The what?

RB: You know what the opposite sex is, don't you?

RC: Yes. It's the tart who lives across the road.

RB: Talking of which, my sister-in-law has just had quads.

RC: That's pretty rare, isn't it?

RB: Rare? Certainly. Doctors say it only happens once in one million six hundred thousand times.

RC: Blimey. It's a wonder she ever found time to do any housework.

Comedy classic: the problem of pismonunciation

RB: Good evening. I am the president for the loyal society for the relief of sufferers from pismonunciation; for people who cannot say their worms correctly. Or who use the wrong worms entirely, so that other people cannot underhand a bird they are spraying. It's just that you open your mouse, and the worms come tumbling out in wuk a say that you dick knock what you're thugging a bing, and it's very distressing.

I'm always looting it, and it makes one feel umbumferkookle; especially when going about one's diddly tasks — slopping in the slooper-market, for inkstands. Only last wunk I approached the chuckout point, and showed the ghou! behind the crash desk the contents of my trillely, and she said "Alright, grandad, shout 'em out."

Well, of course, that's fine for the ordinary man in the stoat, who has no dribble with his warts, but to someone like myself, it's worse than a kick in the jackstrop. Sometimes you get stuck on one letter, such as wubbleyou, and I said "I've got a tin of whoop, a woocum-

ber, two packets of wees and a wallyflower." She tried to make fun of me and said "That will be woo pounds and wify wee pence."

So I said "Wobblers" and walked out.

So you see how dickyfelt it is. But help is at hand. A society has been formed by our mumbler to help each other in times of ex cream ices. It is bald "Pismonuncers Unanimous" and anyone can ball them up on the smelly-fone at any tight of the day or gnome, 24 flowers a spray, seven stays a creak, and they will come round and get you drunk. For foreigners, there will be interpreters who will all squeak many sandwiches, such as Swedish, Turkish, Burkish, Jewish, Gibberish and Rubbish. Membranes will be able to attend tight stool for heaving grasses, to learn how to grope with the many kerplinkities of daily loaf.

Which brings me to the drain reason for squawking to you tonight. The Society's first function, as a body, was a Grand Garden Freight, and we hope for many more bodily functions in the future. The Garden Plate was held in the grounds of Blenheim Paliase,

Woodstick, and guest of horror was the great American pip-singer, Manny Barrowload. The fête was opened by the Bleeder of the Proposition, Mr Neil Pillock, who gave us a few well-frozen worms in praise of the Society's jerk and said that in the creaks and stunts that lie ahead we must all do our nut-roast to ensure that it sucks weeds.

Then everyone visited the various stalls and abruisements, the rudabouts, thingboats and dodgers, and of course the old favourites such as coeoshy nuts, stry your length, guessing the weight of the cook, and tinning the pail on the wonkey. The occasional was great fun and, in short, I think it can safely be said that all the men present and thoroughly good women were had all the time.

So please join our Society. Write to me, Doctor Small Pith (caption: "DR PAUL SMITH") The Spanner, Poke Moses (caption: "THE MANOR, STOKE POGES") and I will send you some brieflets to browse through and a brass badge to wear in your loop-hole. And a very pud night to you all.

A great writer, a great actor and a great loss to us all. I think God must have needed cheering up

CRAIG CASH

He made me laugh so much and I'm just so lucky to have been able to get to know my hero and the person that I aspire to be

PETER KAY

I never liked porridge until I saw him in it

JO BRAND



Comedy classic: The Four Candles sketch

An old ironmonger's shop. A shop that sells everything — garden equipment, ladders, tights, builders' supplies, mousetraps — everything. A long counter up and down stage. A door to the back of the shop up left. The back wall also has a counter. Lots of drawers and cupboards up high, so that Corbett has to get a ladder to get some of the goods that Barker orders. RC is serving a woman with a toilet roll. He is not too bright.

Ronnie Corbett: There you are. Mind how you go.

(Woman exits. RB enters — a workman. Not too bright either.) Yes, sir?

Ronnie Barker: Four candles?

RC: Four candles? Yes, sir. (He gets four candles from a drawer.) There you are.

RB: No — fork handles.

RC: Four candles. That's four candles!

RB: No, fork handles — handles for forks.

RC: Oh, fork handles! (He gets a garden fork handle from the back of the shop.)

Anything else?

RB: (Looks at his list.) Got any plugs?

RC: What sort of plugs?

RB: Bathroom — rubber one.

(RC gets box of bath plugs, holds up two different sizes.)

RC: What size?

RB: Thirteen amp!

RC: Oh, electric plugs! (Gets electric plug from drawer.) What else?

RB: Saw tips.

RC: Saw tips? What you want, ointment?

RB: No, tips to cover the saw.

RC: Oh, No, we ain't got any.

RB: Oh. Got any hoes?

RC: Hoes? Yeah. (He gets a garden hoe from the garden department.)

RB: No, — hose.

RC: Oh, hose. I thought you meant hoes.

(He gets a roll of garden hose.)

RB: No, hose.

RC: (Gives him a dirty look.) What hose?

(He gets a packet of ladies' tights from a display stand.) Pantie-hose, you mean?

RB: No, 'O's! — letter 'O's — letters for the gate. Mon Repos.

RC: Why didn't you say so? (He gets ladder, climbs up to cupboard high up on wall, gets down box of letters.) Now, 'O's — here we are — two?

RB: Yeah.

RC: Right. (He takes box back up ladder and returns.) Next?

RB: Got any 'P's?

RC: Oh, my Gawd. Why didn't you bleedin' say while I'd got the box of letters down here? I'm working me guts out here climbing about all over the shop, putting things back and then gettin' 'em out again. Now then, (He is back with the box.) How many — two?

RB: No — peas. Three tins of peas.

RC: You're haying me on, ain't yer? Ain't yer! (He gets three tins of peas.)

RB: No, I ain't. I meant tinned peas.

RC: Right. Now what?

RB: Pumps?

RC: Pumps? Hand pumps or foot pumps?

RB: Foot pumps.

RC: Foot pumps. Right. (He goes off, returns with foot pump.) Right.

RB: No, pumps for your feet! Brown pumps, size nine.

RC: You are haying me on, I've had enough of this. (He gets them from drawer.) Is that the lot?

RB: Washers?

RC: (Exasperated.) Windscreen washers, car washers? Dishwashers? Hair washers?

Back scrubbers? Lavatory cleaners? Floor washers?

RB: Half-inch washers!

RC: Tap washers! Here, give me the list.

I'm fed up with this. (He reads list and reacts.) Right! That does it. That's the final insult. (Calls through door.) Elsie! Come and serve this customer — I've had enough!

(RC stalks off. Elsie enters — a big, slovenly woman with a very large bosom. She takes the list. Reads it.)

Elsie: Right, sir — what sort of knockers are you looking for?

■ Extracted from *All I Ever Wrote: The Complete Works of Ronnie Barker*, Sidgwick & Jackson, £14.99

9 Bel Mooney

The husband who's
having an affair online

11 Style

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**And it's goodbye
from him...**

The genius of
Ronnie Barker

OBITUARIES

RONNIE BARKER

Comic actor and writer acclaimed for his hilarious character roles in *The Two Ronnies*, *Porridge* and *Open All Hours*

RONNIE BARKER was not a comedian, he was an actor with a talent for comedy. He made his name as one half of *The Two Ronnies*, the roly-poly counterpart to the pint-sized Ronnie Corbett. He went on to make a reputation on his own in BBC sitcoms such as *Porridge* and *Open All Hours*.

Plump and beaming, Ronnie Barker looked like an avuncular bank manager, but in costume and make-up he slipped into characters with apparent ease. Sir Peter Hall described him as "the great actor that we lost" — a natural for such roles as Falstaff and Sir Toby Belch.

Barker had come to comedy through theatre, but once he had embraced the small screen, with all its limitations, he did not look back: "I think it's better to make people laugh than cry," he said.

His finest creation was Norman Stanley Fletcher in *Porridge*, a habitual criminal who, in the words of his sentencing judge, "accepts arrest as an occupational hazard and presumably accepts imprisonment in the same casual manner." Snout in pocket, gum in mouth, Fletcher was the old lag who knew the rules.

As a scriptwriter Barker loved to play with language. Sketches for *The Two Ronnies* were laced with spoonerisms and doubles entendres. A luckless character might go into a shop asking for fork handles, and be given four candles. This was not the kind of humour which could be made up off the cuff — it was based on precise scripts and perfect timing.

Barker was the first to admit that, without a script, he was not funny. He was in awe of Corbett's ability to sit casually in front of an audience and tell shaggy-dog stories. Barker enjoyed live performance but only when in character — off-stage he was a quiet family man.

He and Corbett were a uniquely independent double act. Despite the difference in their size — which provided visual jokes — they had a similar style, and both were comfortable playing the feed or the comedian. The success of *The Two Ronnies* might easily have confined them to a life-long partnership. They were friends, too, but both wanted to maintain separate careers and did so through their own sitcoms. While it was impossible to imagine Eric Morecambe without Ernie Wise, it was not impossible to imagine Barker without Corbett.

Ronald William George Barker was born in Bedford in 1929 and brought up in Oxford, where his father had a clerical job with Shell. Educated at the City of Oxford High School, Barker initially trained to be an architect but abandoned the course after six months, convinced that he did not have



Barker in 1975: he admitted that without a script he was not funny; his humour was based on precise scripts and perfect timing

the necessary talent. Unenthused, he joined the Westminster Bank and dreamed of becoming an actor. He spent many adolescent hours in his room, listening to radio comedians such as Tommy Handley. He kept his fellow clerks amused with impersonations and plotted his escape.

The opportunity arose when he joined the Manchester Repertory Company which, singularly, was based in Aylesbury. It was not a successful company, but Barker was enthralled. He made his professional debut on November 15, 1948, as Lieutenant Spicer in J.M. Barrie's

Quality Street. There was a new play every week. Although Barker was less portly as a youth, he was evidently not juvenile lead material, and mostly took comic roles.

In 1951 he joined the Oxford Playhouse where he spent three years. Working alongside him was the young Maggie Smith. Barker was not impressed by her youthful range, and ruefully remembered advising her to give up. Another colleague was Peter Hall, who was similarly pessimistic about Barker's own future. Over a pint of beer, he told Barker, "You and I will

never really get on in this business, Ron. You have to be queer to get on in this business."

It was Hall who gave Barker his break. In 1955 Hall directed a production of *Mourning Becomes Electra* at the Arts Theatre, London. He saw two good parts in it for Barker, and asked his friend to join him.

In 1957 Barker married Joy Tubb, an assistant stage manager. Having acquired a family to feed he kept himself employed in West End theatre for several years, but it was radio which made "Ronnie" Barker, as he now styled himself, known to a national audience. In 1959 he

was offered the role of Able Seaman Johnson in the BBC's new radio comedy, *The Navy Lark*. The half-hour programme was intended as a vehicle for Jon Pertwee, but Barker's role expanded as the show became a hit.

He also started to do film work, providing the character backbone to several British comedies. In the early 1960s he supported Jimmy Edwards in his television series, *The Seven Faces of Jim*.

Barker met Corbett in an actors' club off Shaftesbury Avenue in 1963 — "standing on a crate," he joked, in order to

see over the bar. Corbett was serving drinks. He told Barker that he was a stand-up comedian from Edinburgh, resting between jobs.

Neither thought any more of the meeting until being brought together in 1966 by David Frost, front man on *That Was the Week That Was*. Frost was planning a new series of satirical sketches, and he enlisted the support of John Cleese, Barker and Corbett. During the filming of *The Frost Report*, the quartet tended to divide itself into two couples: Frost and Cleese, the Oxbridge satirists, Barker and Corbett, the ex-grammar school comedians.

After two series the show moved to ITV as *Frost on Sunday*. There Barker began to write his first scripts under the pseudonym Gerald Wiley, and also began to toy with the idea of a dialogue-free film (what he called his "grumble and grunt film"). Now sufficiently well-known to find backing, he made *Futtock's End* in 1969. It was one of the first outings for Barker's dotty Lord Rustless, and was followed by *The Picnic* (1975) and *By the Sea* (1982). Whimsical and rather slow, these films were not typical of Barker's usual comic style but they found a loyal audience among students.

In television, Barker was given his first top-billing show with *The Ronnie Barker Playhouse* (1968). But however high Barker was riding on ITV, Frost was having his own problems, and the following year his company, Paradine, was sacked. Because Corbett and Barker were contracted to his company, they too were sacked.

Before the news became public, the new head of light entertainment at the BBC, Bill Cotton, saw Corbett and Barker perform a sketch at the Bafta awards at the Palladium and offered them a contract on the spot.

The first series of *The Two Ronnies* was broadcast in 1971 and from the start it was a hit. Each show began with a news desk item, progressed through sketches, a serial such as "The Phantom Raspberry Blower of Old London Town", a monologue from Corbett, and Barker's slot in which he appeared as a spokesman for some eccentric society. They ended with a musical number, a couple of late news items, and then the sign-off from Corbett — "It's good night from me" — and Barker — "And it's good night from him."

Barker wrote about three quarters of the material. He worked hard, filming all day, and spending his evenings in editing suites. But there was never any animosity between him and Corbett. Barker would give his friend the good lines in one sketch, and take them himself in the next.

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Twelve series of the show were made over the next 15 years, as well as numerous Christmas specials. With 20 million people regularly watching the show, the BBC offered Barker a free hand at what he now wanted to do as a solo artist. He chose to try out several new ideas for sitcoms, under the banner *Seven of One* in 1973. One of the pilots was called *Open All Hours*, and another *Prisoner and Escort*.

The prisoner idea was felt to be the strongest, and the writers Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais (creators of *The Likely Lads*) got to work. The show was about what it took to survive in prison, the little day-to-day triumphs over the system that kept the prisoners sane.

It was obvious from the start that *Porridge* was something special. The scripts and the supporting cast of Fulton Mackay and Richard Beckinsale were perfect. But Barker was determined not to be pushed into being known only as "that prisoner fellow" and asked to do only two series of *Porridge*.

In 1976 he appeared as his newest incarnation — the stuttering Yorkshire shopkeeper Arkwright — in a sitcom about a corner shop, *Open All Hours*. For this he enlisted the support of a young actor who worked as an electrician between jobs, David Jason. The first series went almost unnoticed because of the BBC decision to screen in on BBC2.

Disappointed, Barker was lured back to a third series of *Porridge* and a follow-up series, *Going Straight*, also with Beckinsale playing Lenny Godber, about Fletcher's life after his release. It was only a modest success, and its fate was sealed when the 31-year-old Beckinsale died of a heart attack.

Barker's diary remained full. He won three Bafta awards. In 1978 he and Corbett were appointed OBE. The same year they took *The Two Ronnies* show to the Palladium, followed by a tour of Australia.

Every few years Barker produced a book. He had been collecting antique saucy postcards for years, and found that editing compilations made a lucrative sideline. His *Book of Bathing Beauties* (1974) was followed by such titles as *Book of Boudoir Beauties* (1975), *Gentlemen's Relish* (1979), *Ooh La La: The Ladies of Paris* (1983) and *A Pennyworth of Art* (1986).

But the BBC still wanted him back in a sitcom. In 1981, with no new material to hand, the BBC asked Barker to film another series of *Open All Hours*. This time it was broadcast on BBC1, and the result was a success. Barker made a further three series of the show.

Barker had his first taste of failure in 1984, with the flop of a sitcom about a flamboyant Welsh photographer, *The Magnificent Evans*. Soon afterwards he confided to Corbett that he was thinking of retiring. He felt he had run out of fresh ideas, and had no ambitions left. He preferred to quit while he was on top and enjoy retirement with his wife in the Cotswolds. Barker made the announce-



"... And it's goodnight from him": Ronnie Barker with Ronnie Corbett, top, in *The Two Ronnies*; between John Cleese and Corbett in *The Frost Report*, middle left; as Arkwright in *Open All Hours*; right, and as Fletcher, with Richard Beckinsale, in *Porridge*, below

ment to the rest of the world in 1987, via a message on his telephone answering machine. The profession was stunned.

Barker embraced retirement as wholeheartedly as he had approached his career. He and his wife moved to a converted mill and ran an antiques shop — "I lose money every week," he said, "but it's a hobby. It's cheaper than skiing and safer at my age."

He published an autobiography, *Dancing in the Moonlight: My Early Years on the Stage*

(1993), and *All I Ever Wrote*, a compilation of all his comedy sketches, appeared in 1999.

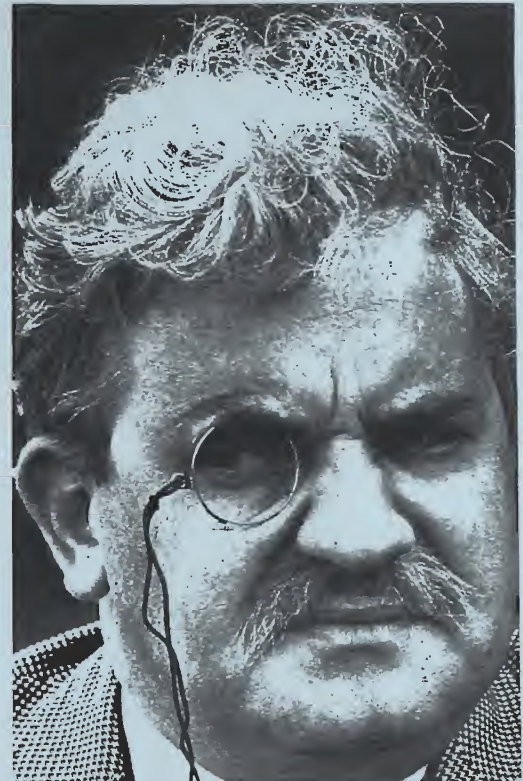
While Barker resisted the numerous attempts to lure him back, his fans had to content themselves with repeats which the BBC broadcast with some regularity. A play, *Mum* (King's Head Theatre, 1998), flopped — it received, he said, "the worst notices of any play in the history of the theatre".

Eventually he was persuaded to appear in a retrospective production of the *Two Ronnies*,

after which he played the manservant to Albert Finney's Churchill in the TV drama *The Gathering Storm* (2002). This was followed by a role as a retired general in *My House in Umbria* (2003), with Maggie Smith and Timothy Spall.

Ronnie Barker is survived by his wife, their two sons and their daughter.

Ronnie Barker, OBE, comedy actor and writer, was born on September 25, 1929. He died on October 3, 2005, aged 76.



REGISTER OBITUARIES

THE TIMES WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 5 2005

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GOODNIGHT FROM HIM

Britain's living rooms bid farewell to a comic genius

The conferral of genius status on sportsmen and women, on politicians and actors, authors and scientists, living and dead, is bandied about too readily. Genius is not about succeeding against the odds or excelling. Nor is it about pre-eminence or longevity. Too often it is confused with courage or flair. It is not about standing above or alone or apart. Genius is rare and timeless, genius transcends, genius defies the humdrum laws of being that confine the rest of us. And by these measures was Ronnie Barker a genius. Not because he was unfailingly

funny, or that the laughter he brought into British living rooms for the best part of two decades was both innocent and wise. Genius can be playful: "Don't just crit there sitcising," says Arkwright in *Open All Hours*. It can be ribald, as in *Porridge*, when a doctor says: "I want you to fill one of those containers for me", and Fletcher replies, from across the room: "What, from 'ere?" Often, as in *The Two Ronnies*, it is simple: "The toilets at a local police station have been stolen. Police say they have nothing to go on." The warmth felt towards Barker is all

the more heartfelt because he had the attributes that the generations of entertainers succeeding him lack. He was generous and modest, did not crave the limelight and disliked talking about himself. Yet he has few peers. Like Eric Morecambe, he played superbly off a straighter partner. His instinct for one-liners matched that of Tommy Cooper. Like John Cleese, his feeling for character produced comedy icons, notably Norman Stanley Fletcher, the careworn lag. It may be time to bid goodbye to him, but thanks to videotape, his creations will remain alive in our homes.



'God needed cheering up'

LAUGHTER AS WELL AS TEARS AT RONNIE BARKER'S FUNERAL

SEE PAGE 5

Daily Express Friday October 14 2005

Farewell Ronnie

Laughter and tears for a comic genius

By Mark Reynolds

THERE may have been no star-studded cast, but a script full of humour and tears ensured that Ronnie Barker was given a fitting send-off yesterday.

Just 25 close family members and friends joined the star's widow Joy, daughter Charlotte and son Larry at a funeral service for the much-loved comic genius who died earlier this month at the age of 76.

There was laughter when a tribute was read out which said simply: "God needed cheering up."

And there were tears as his favourite passages from literature were read out.

Ronnie's comedy partner Ronnie Corbett, 74, was not present but will attend a later memorial service with a host of showbusiness stars.

His fugitive son Adam, who is wanted by police for alleged child pornography offences, failed to attend his father's funeral.

An intensely private man and an agnostic, Ronnie chose to have a humanist service at Banbury Crematorium near his Oxfordshire home.

His coffin was taken there in a Volvo hearse adorned with floral tributes.

The 30-minute service held in a chapel in the grounds, began with his daughter Charlotte, 43, reading his favourite passage from *Alice in Wonderland*.

Dignified

There was then a family tribute in which his professional successes, love of antiques and passion for old board games was discussed.

After a period's reflection, which is a standard part of a humanist ceremony, there was a piece of music by Schumann.

This was followed by the committal, during which the poet Christina Rossetti's *Remember Me* was read as the flower-decked coffin moved behind the curtains.

Nigel Collins, the humanist celebrant who carried out the service, explained: "There were no hymns or prayers but in the tribute there were things that brought both laughter and tears."

Mr Collins, 58, said that while none of the comedian's celebrated jokes had been relayed during the ceremony, it had nevertheless been "dignified but not sombre".

He explained: "Alice in Wonderland was his favourite book and he had collected many volumes."

And he revealed that the phrase "God needs cheering up" had come from the actor Craig Cash.

Speaking of the family's tribute, Mr Collins said: "They all talked about the

ABSENT: Ronnie's

Remember

REMEMBER me when I am gone away,
Gone far away into the silent land;
When you can no more hold me by the hand,
Nor I half turn to go, yet turning stay.
Remember me when no more day by day
You tell me of our future that I planned:
Only remember me; you understand
It will be late to counsel then or pray.
Yet if you should forget me for a while
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:
For if the darkness and corruption leave
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,
Better by far you should forget and smile
Than that you should remember and be sad

Christina Rossetti, 1830-1894



SUCH A LOSS: Joy, Ronnie's wife of 48 years, left, and his daughter Charlotte leaving the humanist service yesterday. Only 25 close family and friends attended the ceremony during which Christina Rossetti's touching poem *Remember Me* was read

years running his antique shop and how much he enjoyed that, and what an unusual business it had been because it had Ronnie's own personality reflected in it.

"He was very keen on board games, usually ones that went back a long time and he loved to dust off an old board game that he would find in

Usually in a tribute there need to be things that bring smiles to people's faces so you have laughter and tears."

While the family had called for privacy, the cloud of Ronnie's son hung over the ceremony.

Adam, 39, is still wanted by police but remains on the run despite officers' pleas for him to get the matter cleared up.

Ten police officers patrolled the grounds of the crematorium clutching official warrant papers in case Adam decided to attend.

Banbury Crematorium is just a few miles from Ronnie's home

Norton, where he ran the antique shop.

The choice of a non star-studded funeral did not surprise those who knew the comic giant.

He was an intensely private family man who shunned showbusiness parties. However, although he announced his retirement in 1987, he had recently been lured back to television.

Barker and Corbett filmed a Christmas special of *The Two Ronnies' Sketchbook* which is scheduled to be shown this December.

Ronnie Barker was a talented

attracted plaudits for his work in two TV films, *My House in Umbria*, in which he starred in 2003 alongside Dame Maggie Smith, and *The Gathering Storm*, in which he played the manservant Inch in 2002 to Albert Finney's Winston Churchill.

After a long battle against a heart condition, he had been nursed at his home. He and Joy had been married for 48 years.

A huge number of tributes followed the announcement of his death, and stars are expected to turn out in force for his memorial which is likely to be held at Covent